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The Gentleman, the Vagabonds and the Stranger: Cultural Representations of Large Carnivores in Albania and their Implications for Conservation

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The Gentleman, the Vagabonds and the Stranger: Cultural Representations of Large Carnivores in Albania and their Implications for Conservation

Balkan lynx in Munella mountain ©PPNEA/BLRP

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Abstract

This thesis explores how people in mountainous regions of Albania interrelate with large carnivores. For the research, I used a combination of questionnaire survey and ethnographic fieldwork to generate insights into how rural dwellers perceive and interact with bears, wolves and lynx. Research and conservation efforts relating to large carnivores in areas where they live near humans often have a strong focus on human-wildlife conflicts; with the presumption that conflicts are a central part of people's relationships with predators. I argue that, although conflicts between people and predators do occur, human-predator relationships in highland Albania are complex and diverse, beyond a simple engagement with conflict-causing animals. Large carnivores have rich local cultural profiles; each species being differently perceived, and responded to, by local groups in terms of their beliefs about the behaviours and characteristics of the animals.

I argue that large carnivores are constructed, and responded to, as social actors and, as such, they are integrated into the moral community of humans. Customary codes that regulate the social life of people in highland Albania seem to extend into relationships with carnivores. Damages from predators are largely interpreted and evaluated on principles of belonging and moral integrity with little considerations of their financial aspects.

Lack of conservation efforts from Albanian institutions for prolonged periods of time, and the remoteness of mountain communities, has brought about a situation in which locals have been largely left uninfluenced in shaping their relationships with large carnivores. I contend that such a situation, albeit seemingly problematic from an outside perspective, is particularly beneficial in maintaining low conflicts with, or over, predators. Recent increases in conservation efforts in Albania may influence relationships between people and predators in

the future. Conservation actors will be faced with the challenge of avoiding possible conflict escalation to the detriment of large carnivores and to rural livelihoods.

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“Se bisha, që bije dëmnë, errësir' e mjergull kërkon,

Papo bariu shum' ahere vë re dhe mba vesh e dëgjon,”

– Naim Frashëri, “Bagëti e Bujqësi”, 1886

“Because the beast that brings damage, fog and darkness is seeking,

But then the wary shepherd, with his open ears is listening,”

– Naim Frashëri, “Flocks and Crops”, 1886

1. Introduction

1.1. Research rationale

Conflicts over natural resources and biodiversity are some of the most pressing issues for conservation for the 21st century (Macdonald & Willis 2013). As the global human population is projected to increase to more than 9 billion people by 2050 and developing countries are becoming more industrialised, human pressures and encroachment on natural ecosystems and resources are expected to increase as well (Millenium Ecosystem Assessment 2005). There are many cases of biodiversity conflicts that illustrate how human interests, economies, and sometimes lives, can be directly threatened by wildlife species with whom they share the same environments (Woodroffe et al. 2005). Conservationists are particularly concerned with such conflicts, given that they often give rise to retaliation measures by people and therefore threaten the existence of many species. Traditional views of human-wildlife conflicts have often been explained and measured in terms of direct wildlife damage to human property, economies and well-being. Countless examples of these exist, including depredation on livestock by large predators, crop-raiding by mammals and birds worldwide and even attacks on humans by large predators (Woodroffe et al. 2005). However, an increasing amount of research on biodiversity conflicts shows that material conflicts are only a small part of a larger and more complex picture. It is often the case that conflicts arise due to differences in attitudes, values and beliefs concerning wildlife, by different groups of people, which might have very little to do with the physical and material damages in question (Linnell 2013, Young et al. 2010). The current understanding of human-wildlife conflicts is that economic and material damage is often only

a small manifestation of such conflicts, which are embedded in larger disputes that exist between different groups of people due to the values – be those economic or cultural – that they invest in wildlife or to what wildlife represents to them. These are framed as conflicts between humans over wildlife and the term human-human conflicts is being increasingly applied in the literature (Dickman 2010, Linnell 2013, Madden 2004, Redpath et al. 2013).

Understanding and managing these conservation conflicts remains a challenging endeavour for nature conservation worldwide due to their diversity and complexity. Traditionally, conservationists have placed a strong emphasis on scientific ecological research to uncover the extent and magnitude of human-wildlife conflicts and to inform adequate actions for their management. However, it is often the case that human perceptions of, and attitudes toward wildlife and their damages do not appear to be in line with findings provided by ecological research. For example, a study comparing quantified damage with perceived damage by wildlife on farm crops near the Kibale National Park in Uganda shows that local perceptions of damaging species and damaged crops differed substantially from the extent of damage and species involved as revealed by the on-ground systematic monitoring. Locals tended to be more likely to blame larger mammals, which were involved in rare and localised, but potentially catastrophic, damages, whose cumulative impact over time was significantly lower than that of smaller mammals or even domestic animals (Naughton-Treves 1997). Particularly when large carnivores are concerned, human perceptions and attitudes towards them are often exacerbated opinions, that have little foundations on their biological and behavioural features. Linnell et al. (2002), in an extensive review of historical and recent attacks of wolves on humans, indicate that even though cases of physical attack on people are very rare and likely to be dictated by health and behavioural problems of single individuals (such as rabies

infection, habituation to people), people's expression of fear towards them is far greater than is seemingly justified. Similarly, even though damage to livestock and other human property by wolves and bears in Norway is comparatively less than by lynx and wolverines, partly due to the more limited distribution and smaller population of the former two (Andersen et al. 2003), public attitudes and perceptions toward wolves and bears in Norway tend to be more negative than toward lynx and wolverines (Kleiven et al. 2004, Roskaft et al. 2007).

Such discrepancies between people's perceptions and attitudes towards conflict situations and quantified findings on conflicts from ecological research might lead to deepening, escalation and polarisation of conflicts, if wildlife management and conservation practices are to be based solely on the latter. There are many cases of biodiversity conflicts that illustrate how such conflicts can persist for a long time, despite the scientific research or evidence provided. Prominent examples come from wildlife conservation in the United Kingdom, such as the conflict between conservationists and game managers over the issue of hen harrier-red grouse predation (Thirgood & Redpath 2008). Hen harriers (*Circus cyaenus*) are internationally protected under the Birds Directive; however, local shooting estate owners in the UK perceive them to be a threat to the red grouse (*Lagopus lagopus*) and their shooting economy and this often leads to illegal killing of harriers. Ecological research focusing on this conflict for more than 30 years has not helped to create broader consensus or compromises. On the contrary, conflict has sometimes been deepened by disputes, between the different parties involved, about the interpretation of the scientific data (Young et al. 2010). The re-introduction of Eurasian beaver (*Castor fiber*) in the United Kingdom has evoked similar conflict situations (Campbell-Palmer & Jones 2014). Beavers are slowly re-colonising Scotland's rivers, either through planned experimental re-introductions or accidental escapes. However, this process is

still under evaluation by the Scottish Natural Heritage and a final decision on whether the current free-living animals will be allowed to exist, is yet to be made by the Scottish Government (Campbell-Palmer & Jones 2014). Understandably, most of the opposition against the return of beavers comes from the farming community in Scotland and there is evidence of damage caused by beavers to watercourses serving plantations and agricultural activities. However, there is also opposition from the salmon fishery community (ASFB 2012), in spite of ecological research largely indicating that there are no detrimental effects of beavers on freshwater fish stocks. On the contrary, scientific reports and reviews indicate that beavers' presence in riverine ecosystems is, in most cases, beneficial to maintaining healthy fish populations (Kemp et al. 2010).

Large carnivores are among the species that have highly conflicting relationships with humans. They often bring up quite contrasting feelings among different groups of people, ranging from adoration and reverence to despising and hatred. It is primarily due to this highly variable attitudes gradient that they are highly challenging to preserve over the long term (Gittleman et al. 2001). This conflicting relationship has been at the centre of many studies worldwide (Fascione et al. 2004, Kruuk 2002, Woodroffe et al. 2005). In the past decades, there has been a general recognition that the conservation of large carnivores is equally, if not more, dependant on human acceptance and conflict solution than merely fulfilling their ecological requirements through legal protection or proclamation of protected areas (Baker et al. 2008, Linnell 2013, Linnell et al. 2001). Particular importance should be put on the acceptance of large carnivores by local people who share environments with them as they are the ones who often bear the costs of having these species present in the landscape (Enserink & Vogel 2006, Sillero-Zubiri & Laurenson 2001). Knowledge of public attitudes, beliefs and perceptions

towards predators is therefore crucial for outlining adequate conservation and management strategies in the long run.

The charismatic status of large carnivores and their special relationships with humans make them among the most conspicuous species for researchers and conservationists worldwide (Gittleman et al. 2001). Traditionally, most research on large carnivores has emerged from the biological sciences and has been aimed at studying their ecology in natural systems. This has helped generate an enormous amount of information related to status, distribution, behaviour, home range, reproduction, genetics and many other biological attributes. There is however increasing interest from other disciplines, particularly within social sciences and humanities, in focusing on these species primarily because of their appeal to humans, the relationships between them, and the environmental value they carry in terms of nature conservation (Kellert et al. 1996). A substantial part of the interest in carnivores stems from conservation practice and the challenges faced by the struggle for their preservation. As top predators have wide-ranging requirements in terms of spatial and ecological resources (Woodroffe & Ginsberg 1998) they are quite challenging to preserve in an increasingly human-dominated planet. However, it is mostly the clash between their predatory nature and human interests and livelihoods that is the basis of this challenge. Large carnivores can be particularly damaging to humans, causing economic loss (livestock predation, crop raiding, game species depletion) and even posing direct threats to people's lives (Sillero-Zubiri & Laurenson 2001). These have led to their persecution in the past, often to the point of total extermination in many regions of the world (Breitenmoser 1998, Kruuk 2002). With the advent of the environmental movement attitudes and subsequently, policies, towards large carnivores have undergone a complete turnaround, from persecution and extermination to protection and conservation. Particularly on the European continent,

populations of brown bears, grey wolves and Eurasian lynx have recovered in the past decades, either through natural re-colonisation or by reintroduction initiatives (Breitenmoser 1998, Linnell et al. 2009, Chapron et al. 2014). However, this recovery has not come without controversy. In areas where large carnivores are reappearing there is increasing tension among locals who are directly affected by the presence of these animals in the landscape (Enserink & Vogel 2006).

Increasing contributions from social sciences have helped unveil the complexity of relationships between large carnivores and humans. Studies of attitudes indicate that people's perceptions of predators are highly complex and linked with a number of local and individual attributes, such as distance from large carnivores, age, gender, education, species of carnivore concerned and that perceptions are often variable through time (Linnell 2013). It is often the case that support for large carnivore conservation comes from a majority of population that is not directly affected by their presence in the landscape (e.g. urban populations) and that the negative effects and costs are carried by a small minority who have to live with and directly share their environments with predators (e.g. rural populations). Currently, in the face of recovering large carnivore populations throughout Europe, increasing and maintaining public acceptance of, and tolerance towards, these species, addressing social conflicts and building and strengthening institutional bridges, emerge as key issues related to their conservation and management (Linnell 2013).

Considering the above, research on relationships and conflicts between humans and predators calls for interdisciplinary approaches that take into account the ecological and social dimensions of the problem as well as a combination of quantitative and qualitative information on these relationships. Even though this approach has long been recommended in conservation science (Mascia et al. 2003), there are hardly any initiatives that attempt to implement it within a single

project. Usually interdisciplinary recommendations stem from findings of single disciplines, or at best through extensive literature reviews (Dickman 2010, Linnell 2013).

With this research study, I focus on existing relationships between local people[1] and large carnivores in highland Albania, through an approach that combines quantitative and qualitative methods for exploring these relationships. The quantitative element stems from recent developments of 'human dimensions' studies (Bath 1998), widely implemented for exploring public attitudes towards wildlife across the European continent (Bath & Majic 2001, Decker et al. 2010, Kaczensky et al. 2004). The qualitative element is based on an ethnographic exploration of rural communities sharing spaces with predators in highland Albania. Albania retains the full community of large carnivores that has been historically present across Europe, including brown bears (*Ursus arctos*), grey wolves (*Canis lupus*) and Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*). Local rural livelihoods have changed little over centuries, and are still characterised by a prevalence of small-scale subsistence farming and transhumance shepherding (Keçi et al. 2008). There is very little research on large carnivores in Albania and in the Balkans in general. These populations remain relatively unknown when compared with the rest of Europe, both in terms of ecological attributes and their interactions with humans. The very limited existing research has been predominantly ecological in nature (Bego et al. 2002, Karamanlidis et al. 2014). Studies of conflicts indicate that the main issue related to large carnivores is depredation on livestock, particularly by wolves (Keçi et al. 2008, Trajçe et al. 2008). Initial studies on relationships with humans reveal that large carnivores are perceived quite differently by different groups of people

[1] The term 'local people' is extensively used throughout the text to refer to people that live close to, and interact with, large carnivores.

and attitudes vary substantially depending on the species concerned (Lescureux & Linnell 2010, Trajçe 2010).

This study has its origins from conservation work I have been involved with in Albania from 2006 onwards, where I have been affiliated with a nature conservation non-profit organisation – Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (hereinafter PPNEA). I have been working at PPNEA as a researcher within the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme (BLRP); an international partnership project concerned with the conservation of the critically endangered Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*) in the south-west Balkans. The aim of this long-term project is to secure the survival of the Balkan lynx through research, awareness and policy actions, local community involvement and building institutional partnerships (Breitenmoser et al. 2008). The BLRP is the first project in the region to complement classical ecological science with a strong social science component by looking in-depth at the public attitudes and relationships with wildlife.

My aim is to build upon the work that I have conducted over the past nine years in Albania by adding an anthropological dimension to understand local human-large carnivore relationships. I focus on groups of people who are most affected by the presence of large carnivores in the landscape by exploring their attitudes, perceptions, experiences and beliefs towards these animals. I seek to develop an understanding of the extent of the influence that large carnivores might have on rural livelihoods and vice versa. By exploring and framing these relationships, I hope to provide grounds for adequate conservation and management strategies in the future that will benefit rural well-being and large carnivores alike.

1.2. Thesis structure

This thesis examines people's perceptions, attitudes and beliefs towards large carnivores and their effect on human interests and livelihoods by focusing on rural communities of highland Albania. The importance of human attitudes and perceptions towards predators has been long recognised in conservation theory and practice, primarily because the intersection of large carnivores and human lives and interests can often result in situations of conflict (Woodroffe et al. 2005). It is widely accepted that conservation and management strategies for large predators need to incorporate these social dimensions as much as they need to incorporate the species' biological and ecological dimensions (Bath 1998, Manfredo 2008). In recent decades, there has been an increasing number of studies focusing on these social and human dimensions of large carnivore conservation and management (Dressel et al. 2015, Johansson et al. 2016). Our understanding of causes and manifestations of human-large carnivore conflicts comes from studies on people's attitudes, perceptions and beliefs towards these species. Recent literature highlights advantages in using a mixed methodology which combines qualitative and quantitative approaches for exploring attitudes and relationships with large predators (Drury et al. 2011, Linnell 2013). Quantitative approaches can unveil the extent, diversity and patterns of human attitudes towards carnivores and can provide insights into factors that influence these attitudes. Qualitative research can provide a more in-depth understanding of the reasons why such attitudes are formed and the ways in which they are manifested, as well as help to unveil the complexity of interrelationships between people and carnivores which might often be missed in standardised quantitative data collection schemes (Drury et al. 2011). This thesis incorporates both quantitative and qualitative approaches in analysing people's perceptions of, and attitudes towards large carnivores. In chapter 2 I make use of well-established 'human

dimensions' research frameworks to provide a quantitative insight into rural attitudes towards bears, wolves and lynx in mountainous areas of eastern Albania and western Macedonia. The extension of the study area beyond the borders of Albania, for this chapter only, offers the opportunity to look at attitudes in a cross-country comparison perspective. Further to this, the aim of this chapter is to give an overview of how a representative sample of the rural population perceives large carnivore species and where the three species stand compared with each-other in terms of attitudes that they evoke among these people.

In chapter 3 I turn to the qualitative element of my research by providing a detailed ethnographic account of the profile of all three large predators, based on my field exploration in highland Albania. I build up from the general overview of attitudes given in chapter 2, to provide a more in-depth understanding of the way respondents in my study, construct and project the images of large carnivores in their daily discourse and lives. I often contrast these constructions, perceptions and beliefs on all three species with ecological and biological information provided by scientific literature.

In chapter 4 I look at human-large carnivore interrelationships from a spatial perspective and discuss the local interpretation of conflicts based on perceptions of place and belonging attributed to predators and humans. Some management approaches for human-large carnivore conflicts focus on the concept of 'zoning' as a framework that outlines territories in the wider landscape by prioritising some areas for large carnivore presence, others for human interests and different gradients of human and large carnivore presence in between (Linnell et al. 2005a). By exploring local perceptions of the territoriality of bears, wolves and lynx, and territorial regulations based on customary and historic social and cultural codes of behaviour in highland

Albania, I seek to contribute to the improvement of conflict management based on such zoning approaches.

Current literature on human-wildlife conflicts argues that the framing of conflicts solely along the human-wildlife axis can be detrimental to the image of carnivores and pre-define them as species existing in a perpetual conflicting relationship with humans (Peterson et al. 2010, Redpath et al. 2013), when in a majority of cases conflicts exist between different groups of people over issues of carnivores rather than between people and carnivores. Several authors have suggested dividing the concept into 'human-human conflicts' and 'human-wildlife impacts' to adequately tackle issues with or over wildlife in general, and predators in particular (Redpath et al. 2015, Young et al. 2010). In chapter 5 I focus on local perceptions of impacts from large carnivores, and their interpretation as problematic events based on customary codes and practices. I further discuss the implications these might have in current understandings of human-wildlife conflicts.

Finally, in chapter 6, I discuss the implications that the above findings have on the Albanian nature conservation context by presenting an historic overview of nature conservation in Albania, its current developments and an outlook into the future. I discuss wider conservation implications faced in Albania, a country undergoing rapid social and economic changes, and how these affect the preservation of large carnivores in particular. The influence of western-based models of conservation on local livelihoods and practices is further discussed together with the role conservationists have in shaping and influencing human-wildlife conflicts in regions with a relatively poor history of nature conservation.

1.3. Study area

My research was conducted in Albania[2], a country located in the Balkan Peninsula, South East Europe (Fig. 1.1). Albania is a small and mostly mountainous country, bordering Montenegro in the north-west, Kosovo in north-east, Macedonia in the east and Greece in the south-east. On the west lie the shores of the Adriatic and Ionian seas, parts of the Mediterranean Sea.

The country has an area of 28,748 sq. km and of these around 70% are rugged hilly and mountainous areas. The average altitude is 708 m a.s.l, with the lowest point being sea level and the highest peak reaching 2753 m a.s.l. at Korabi Mountain peak, bordering with Macedonia. Forests and scrublands cover roughly one third of the country and natural pastures and grasslands cover nearly 15% (Kabo et al. 1991).

Albeit small in size, Albania is renowned for its rich biological diversity, with more than 3200 species of plants, 350 bird species, 80 mammals and more than 330 fish species recorded in the country's territory (Bego & Koni 1999). Albania still sustains significant communities of large carnivores, including brown bears, Eurasian lynx and grey wolves, which have been consistently present in Albania in recent and historic times (Chapron et al. 2014, Psaroudas 2002).

The country's population is 2.8 million people, of whom 54% live in cities and towns and 46% in rural areas (INSTAT 2011). In regard to ethnicity, Albanians comprise the vast majority of the population. The last official census, undertaken in 2011 and based on self-declaration of participants, indicates that some 83% of the population declare themselves as Albanians and less than 2% declare themselves as other ethnic affiliations, including Greek (0.9%),

[2] In Chapter 2 I use information from a quantitative survey conducted in Albania and Macedonia, thus the respective study area for this chapter includes parts of western Macedonia as well (details in Chapter 2).

Macedonian (0.2%), Montenegrin (0.01%), Aromanian (0.3%), Romani (0.3%), Balkan Egyptians (0.1%) and others (0.1%). Notably, around 15% of the population do not declare any ethnic affiliation (INSTAT 2011).

Albanian is the most widely spoken language with some 98% of the population declaring it as their first language (INSTAT 2011). Two major dialects exist, Gheg in the North and Tosk in the South, (Gjinari 1988) and this differentiation, besides linguistic aspects, is considered to extend also in cultural, religious and social ones (Sawicka 2013). In Greek and Macedonian ethnic minority areas in the south and south-east, Greek and Macedonian are spoken respectively as a first language.

Information on religious affiliations is often contested and a subject of debate. The 2011 census reports that some 59% of the population declare themselves as Sunni Muslims, 2% as Bektashi Muslims and around 17% as Christians (INSTAT 2011). Christians are divided between Roman Catholics, living primarily in the north-western part of the country and Albanian Orthodox, living mainly in the south and south-east. Notably, more than 16% of the population declare themselves as non-religious or atheists (INSTAT 2011). Religion is generally considered to have a low influence in the lives of Albanians, and the country is often quoted as an example of religious tolerance and harmony (Beilmann 2006, Clayer 2003, Young 1999).

Historically, communities living in Albania, particularly in the northern parts of the country, were organised in terms of strong individual family connections which were the basis for clans (Whitaker 1968). Extended families were considered the main pillar of social and individual life in Albania and within that a clear patriarchal hierarchy based on age and gender is set, with the eldest male having authority over the rest of family members (Hemming et al. 2012). Local rules, based on customary laws and largely independent of state influence, were used to

regulate intra and inter-family relations as well as general social life (Hemming et al. 2012). Due to a series of socio-economic processes, since the second half of the 20th century, this system has changed considerably – particularly in larger towns and cities – by moving towards more egalitarian and smaller families (Danaj 2014). However, fragments and aspects of traditional family systems still remain in place on highland and remote areas of the country (de Waal 2005). This was also noted in the regions of my ethnographic exploration.

For this research project, I focus on the rural communities living in mountainous regions of northern and eastern Albania, where presence of all three large carnivore species is documented (Trajçe et al. 2008). Given that the project uses datasets and information collected in various timelines and not only during the implementation of the doctoral project itself, I divide the information between (i) the quantitative information collected prior to the start of this project and (ii) the qualitative information collected as part of my ethnographic survey within the timeline of this research project. In this chapter I present a description of the study areas, species and methods related to the ethnographic survey I conducted within the timeline of this research project. The methodology employed for the collection of the quantitative information is presented in the respective chapter (Chapter 2) developed out of that information.

I conducted my ethnographic survey from October 2013 to October 2014, predominantly in two mountainous areas of Albania (Fig. 1.1): (i) Munella Mountain and surroundings in the districts of Puka and Mirdita, North Albania and (ii) Shebenik-Jabllanica mountain range in the district of Librazhd, East Albania, along the border with Macedonia. On occasions I also conducted interviews, discussions and observations in other mountainous regions of the country to a limited extent and when given the opportunity, such as in areas of Korçë, Shkodër,

Kukës and Tropojë. Below, I give an overview of the physical features, natural environments and a brief profile of the population inhabiting the two main areas where my ethnographic exploration took place.

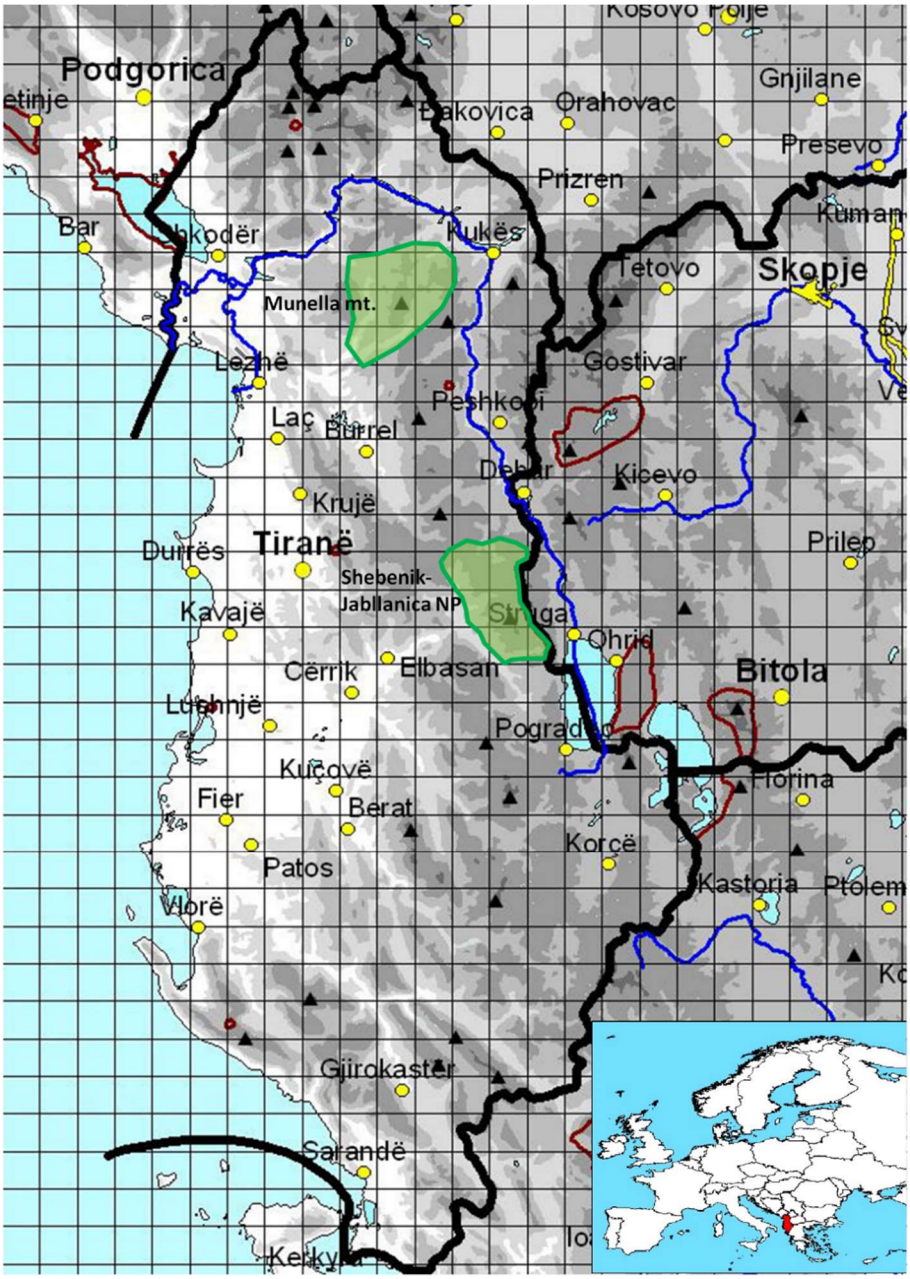

Fig. 1.1. Location of study areas within Albania highlighted in green contour. Munella Mountain and surroundings in the North and Shebenik-Jabllanica National Park in the East; Map grid unit is 10x10 km.

Munella Mountain Region

Munella, located in central-north Albania, is shared between the districts of Puka (N and NW) and Mirdita (S and SE) (Fig. 1.1). The mountain rises to a maximum altitude of 1991 m a.s.l. at its highest point, the Peak of the Cross (in Albanian: *Maja e Kryqit*). It is composed mainly of effusive volcanic rock (up to 1300 – 1400 m) topped by a limestone plaque in the higher part of the mountain. Munella is the highest point of the Pukë-Mirditë Highlands, part of the central-north mountainous area of Albania (Kabo et al. 1991). Munella is known to be very rich in mineral resources, particularly copper, but also other minerals such as chromium, quartz, aluminium, etc. (FESH 1985). The natural geographic boundaries of this mountain massif are the Big Fan and Little Fan rivers – both tributaries of Mati River. The highest limestone part of the mountain has an alpine-like character with very steep slopes; however, the very top of the mountain is a plateau with many karstic holes and funnels.

The broad vegetation belts are oak (*Quercus sp.*) and pines (*Pinus nigra*) from 600 to 1100 m, beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) between 1100 to 1600 m and above this altitude there are rocks with scarce Bosnian pine (*Pinus heldreichii*) trees. The top plateau has extensive alpine pastures and grasslands. Until the 1990s, Munella was known as one of the last remaining sites in Albania with old-growth beech forests (Tabaku 1999, Vangjeli et al. 1997a); however, forest exploitation by humans in the last two decades has destroyed most of its original cover, to the point that such ancient forests do not exist in the area anymore (Schwaderer et al. 2012).

Three large carnivore species – brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) and Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – are known to be present in Munella alongside several prey species, including roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra*), wild boar (*Sus*

scrofa), brown hare (*Lepus europeaus*) and tetraonids (different species of grouse) (Ivanov et al. 2008, Trajçe et al. 2008, 2014a).

The Munella mountain region, from an administrative point of view, is divided between Pukë and Mirditë districts that are part of Shkodër and Lezhë counties respectively. At the time of the field research, six *komuna* (local government units) extended and had a share in the region; namely Gjegjan, Qafë-Mali, Fushë-Arrëz and Rrapë in Pukë district and Orosh and Fan municipalities in Mirditë district. The total population of these is 13,140 inhabitants (INSTAT 2011). However, in 2015 the Albanian first level administrative system underwent a substantial change, where the former system of '*komuna*' was abolished and replaced by '*bashki*' (municipalities) in which several smaller *komuna* were merged into single larger *bashki* (UNDP 2015). Therefore, the area is currently shared between three municipalities; Pukë, Fushë-Arrëz and Mirditë, in which the former six *komuna* mentioned above are now reclassified as local administrative units. The Munella mountain is located in the centre of the historical Mirdita region, which extends to almost double the size of the current district, encompassing the river basins of Big Fan and Little Fan (Gega 2006). The population is of Albanian ethnicity and almost entirely adheres to the Christian Catholic faith. Historically, the main economic activities have been livestock breeding and small-scale farming, however during the socialist period (1945-1990) mining and logging became quite important activities for the local economy (Hemming 2011). Since the collapse of the socialist regime the area has been facing a drastic population decline, with locals migrating out of the area towards big towns, the lowlands and abroad in search of job opportunities and a better life (Carletto et al. 2004, Hemming 2011).

The region is predominantly rural, characterised by scattered small mountain villages. The broad physical landscape consists of agricultural fields in valley bottoms and around villages, forests on mountain slopes and alpine pastures and meadows on mountain tops (Fig. 1.2). The main human activities are small-scale farming, livestock breeding, forestry, collecting non-timber forest products and hunting. The most commonly kept livestock species are goats and sheep and to a lesser extent cattle, pigs, donkeys and horses (Trajçe et al. 2008). Small-scale bee-keeping is practiced by a few families and individuals. Cereals (wheat, maize and oats) are widely cultivated in small scattered arable plots. A variety of fruit trees are planted within and around villages.

Fig. 1.2. Munella mountain with Gjegjan village at the foothills[3]

[3] All photographs in the thesis are my own, unless otherwise credited in the caption.

Most of the agricultural and other economic activities in the area take place in natural landscapes. Livestock grazing occurs in areas around the villages, as well as in highland mountain pastures. Forests are also used for grazing as well as hunting, logging and collection of medicinal and aromatic plants and forest fruits. Crop farming is practiced in small arable land parcels located both within and around the villages. Due to this constant presence of humans in natural environments the potential for human interaction with wildlife is high.

Shebenik-Jabllanica Region

Shebenik-Jabllanica is a mountainous complex of some 340 sq. km. in East Albania, mostly within the district of Librazhd and bordering the Republic of Macedonia (Fig. 1.1). Because of its ecological and environmental diversity, its biodiversity and the local cultures connected with it, (PPNEA 2008; Spangenberg et al. 2011.), the region was proclaimed a National Park in 2008.

The elevations of the area range from 300 to 2200 m, with the highest point being Rreshpa Peak in Shebenik Mountain at 2262 m. The mountains generally have a NW-SE orientation with a maximum length of 30 km. The most prominent valleys dividing the region are those of Qarrishta and Bushtrica rivers (both tributaries of Shkumbin river), which separate the mountains of Shebenik, Miraka and Jabllanica. There are many glacial formations in the area, the most prominent being a number of small glacial lakes present at altitudes above 1500 m.

The vegetation belts found in Shebenik-Jabllanica include oak forests and scrublands (*Quercetum*) from 600 to 1300 m, beech forests (*Fagetum*) from 1300 to 1800 m and alpine pastures and meadows above 1800 m. Forests dominate the landscape with vast expanses of beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), Turkey oak (*Quercus cerris*), hornbeam (*Ostrya carpinifolia*), sessile oak (*Quercus petraea*) and, to a lesser extent, silver fir (*Abies alba*), Bosnian pine (*Pinus*

heldreichii) and Sycamore maple (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) (PPNEA 2006). The upper parts of Bushtrica valley, between Shebenik and Jabllanica, are known to have some remnants of old-growth ancient beech forests (Knapp et al. 2014).

Three large carnivore species – brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) and Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – are known to be present in Shebenik-Jabllanica alongside several wild prey species, including roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra*), wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), brown hare (*Lepus europeaus*) and grouse species (Ivanov et al. 2008, Trajçe et al. 2008).

The Shebenik-Jabllanica region, from an administrative point of view, belongs mostly to Librazhd District within the Elbasan County in central Albania. A small section at the north of the National Park belongs to Bulqiza District of Dibra County. Seven of the former *komuna* (currently local administrative units) have a share in the National Park including Trebisht (in Bulqizë District), Steblevë, Lunik, Qendër-Librazhd, Hotolisht, Qukës and Rrajcë (in Librazhd District). The total population living in these municipalities is 35,230 inhabitants (INSTAT 2011). The majority of these are of Albanian ethnicity, with some villages of Slavic background in the municipalities of Steblevë and Trebisht which are part of the larger Slavic-speaking Golloborda region in Albania (Elsie 2009). The predominant religion is Sunni Islam with a small minority of Christian Orthodox. Historically the main economic activities of the area have been shepherding and small-scale agriculture which continue today. During the socialist era (1945-1990) mining and logging were pivotal to the development of the region; however the mining industry almost ceased after socio-economic changes of the 1990s and logging was banned within the borders of Shebenik-Jabllanica National Park after its proclamation in 2008 (PPNEA 2008). As in the case of Munella mentioned previously,

following the collapse of the socialist regime, this region has also suffered drastic rural depopulation (Carletto et al. 2004, Müller & Sikor 2006).

The region is predominantly rural, characterised by small and segregated mountain villages. The general landscape for human use consists of agricultural fields in valley bottoms and around villages, forests on mountain slopes and alpine pastures and meadows on mountain tops (Fig. 1.3).

Fig. 1.3. Qarrishta village in northern Shebenik.

The main human activities are small-scale farming, livestock husbandry, collecting non-timber forest products and hunting. Since the proclamation of the National Park forestry has been limited to small-scale firewood collection for local consumption. The most commonly kept livestock species are sheep and to a lesser extent goats, cattle, donkeys and horses (Trajçe et al. 2008). Beekeeping is widespread but mostly on a small-scale, family-owned basis and to a

lesser extent for profit-making by selling honey. Cereals (wheat, maize and oats) are widely cultivated, and the area is also well-known for its potato cultivation.

Agricultural and other economic activities of the area take place in nature and natural landscapes. Livestock grazing occurs in areas around the villages, as well as in highland mountain pastures. Forests are also used for grazing, collection of firewood for local use and the collection of medicinal and aromatic plants and forest fruits. Crop farming is practiced in small arable land parcels located around the villages. Given the location of these activities, there is constant presence of humans in natural environments and therefore, as with Munella, the potential for human-wildlife interaction is high.

1.4. Large Carnivores

There is no clear-cut classification of a category of 'large carnivores' within animal species. However, the term is widely used in the literature to refer to terrestrial carnivorous mammals usually with an average body mass above 15-20 kg. In Europe, the IUCN SSC Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe recognises six species of mammals as large carnivores: the brown bear *(Ursus arctos*), grey wolf (*Canis lupus*), wolverine (*Gulo gulo*), Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*), Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*) and golden jackal (*Canis aureus*) (LCIE 2015).

Four of the six large carnivore species in Europe are present in Albania, brown bear, wolf, Eurasian lynx and golden jackal. Of these, brown bears, wolves and lynx predominantly inhabit the hilly-mountainous part of the country and jackals are distributed on the lowlands and along the coastline (Bego et al. 2002, Misja 2006).

Albania is one of the European countries where the least amount of wildlife research has been conducted on native species. Since the early 2000s there has been a slow development of wildlife research in the country, but there are still enormous gaps in knowledge for most species. Large carnivores are one of the species groups for which most data are available because of conservation and research projects implemented in recent years (Breitenmoser et al. 2008, Trajçe et al. 2009a).

Within this research, I focus on the three large carnivore species that are present in Munella Mountain and Shebenik-Jabllanica National Park, brown bear, wolf and lynx with the intention of exploring the relationships that local people living in these areas have developed with them. Golden jackals do not have a reported presence in any of the study areas (Trajçe et al. 2008). Bears, wolves and lynx are also known to be the species most prone to conflict with humans in Europe because of their predatory nature, manifested mostly as attacks on domestic livestock and other human property (Kaczensky 1999). Preliminary findings indicate that this seems to be the case also for Albania (Karamanlidis et al. 2014, Keçi et al. 2008). In the following sections, I summarise the profile of these species in Albania from available literature so far, including their status, distribution, and reported conflicts with humans and human attitudes towards them.

Brown bear

According to the most recent status update of large carnivores in Europe (Kaczensky et al. 2013), brown bears in Albania are distributed in the mountainous regions of north, east and south-east Albania, usually in high-forest habitats above 600 m a.s.l. altitude (Fig. 1.5). They are found in the Albanian Alps (Bjeshkët e Namuna), the central-north mountainous region (Pukë, Mirditë, Lurë, Balgjaj), the Koritnik-Korab mountain range in the east, the central

mountainous region (Qafështamë, Martanesh, Shebenik-Jabllanicë), the central-south region (Shpat, Polis, Valamarë) and the south-eastern mountainous region (Tomorr, Ostrovicë, Prespë, Moravë, Hotovë, Shelegur). They seem to be absent from the south-western mountainous region of the country and the coastal lowlands in the west.

The brown bear population in Albania is part of the larger Dinaric-Pindos population that spreads from Slovenia in the north to Greece in the south (Kaczensky et al. 2013). Albania's geographical location within this distribution makes it of crucial importance for maintaining the connectivity and viability of this population.

Accurate monitoring and research on brown bears in Albania have been largely lacking in the past, thus information on their population status is mostly based on expert estimations (Bego et al. 2002, Swenson et al. 2000). In the past eight years, more solid information on bear presence has been collected, mainly through the work of research and conservation projects undertaken by non-profit organisations. Recent surveys through the use of camera-traps (Fig. 1.4), tracking and sign identification, as well as systematic questionnaires with the local population, have generated substantial knowledge of the distribution and status of brown bears in the country (Ivanov et al. 2008; Trajçe et al. 2008, 2014b; Trajçe & Hoxha 2012) as well as investigating existing conflicts with humans and people's attitudes towards bears (Keçi et al. 2008, Trajçe 2010). Experts estimate that 180 – 200 bears are likely to be present within their distribution areas in Albania (Chapron et al. 2014, Kaczensky et al. 2013).

Fig. 1.4. Brown bear (Ursus arctos) mother with cub in Munella Mountain photographed by a camera-trap set by the PPNEA wildlife research team in 2012, ©PPNEA/BLRP.

The brown bear is classified as Vulnerable (VU) according to the Albanian Red List of Flora and Fauna (Ministry of Environment 2013). Bears enjoy full legal protection status in Albania, sanctioned by the new Law on Wildlife Protection (2008) and Law on Hunting (2010). The species was considered fully protected even during the communist regime, enjoying legal protection at least since 1956. In the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (Bego & Koni 1999) the brown bear is selected as a priority species for conservation and the development of an action plan for its conservation is recommended as an immediate action to take. In 2007 an action plan was compiled (Bego 2007a) and adopted by the Ministry of

Environment; however, to date no concrete action has been implemented in accordance with this document.

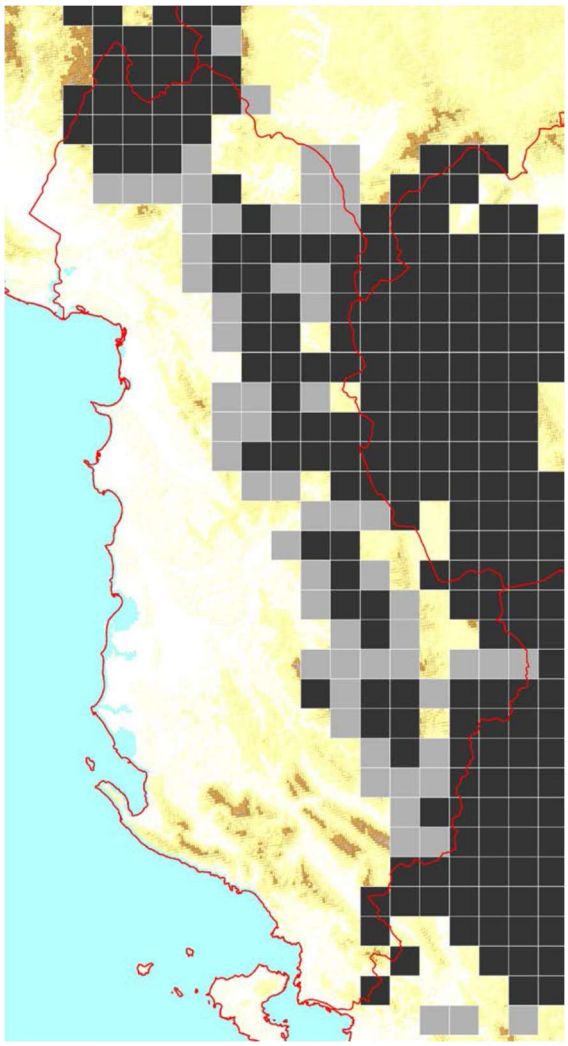

Fig. 1.5. Brown bear distribution in Albania (from Kaczensky et. al. 2013).
Dark cells indicate core and reproduction areas with permanent presence, light grey cells peripheral areas of occurrence. Cells are 10x10 km.

There are frequent accounts of bear attacks on human property. A standardised wildlife baseline survey conducted through the means of questionnaires by PPNEA in 2006-07, gives primary insights into the conflicts existing between humans and brown bears in Albania. Human-bear conflicts seem to be widespread across bear distribution range. Bears are reported to cause damage to crops (corn, wheat, and oats), fruit trees (apples, cherries, plums, etc.), and

to large livestock (cattle, horses, donkeys) and to a lesser extent on small livestock (sheep, goats) and beehives (Keçi et al. 2008, Trajçe et al. 2008). Attacks on humans – albeit rare – are reported in most of the bear distribution areas. However, there has been no case of a fatal attack on humans in recent decades (Keçi et al. 2008, Trajçe et al. 2008). Despite widespread conflicts, public opinion towards bears seems to be predominantly positive, even in areas where humans and bears share the same environments. A human dimension study, aiming to determine public attitudes of the rural population towards large carnivores, reveals that the general public opinion towards bears is mostly positive, support for their conservation is high and the conflicts that brown bears cause are generally tolerated by the local population (Trajçe 2010). There is, however, variation in public opinion across the country and for some regions in the south, public opinion of bears does not seem to be equally positive (Karamanlidis et al. 2014).

The main threats that brown bears face in Albania are linked to human persecution and habitat destruction. Moreover, one major conservation concern for brown bears in Albania is their use for human entertainment and public attraction (Trajçe et al. 2013). Brown bears are increasingly being used, either stuffed through taxidermy or kept alive in captivity, by roadside restaurants or other private enterprises as attraction animals, with the intention of drawing more clients into their premises. This phenomenon seems to be quite widespread and relatively new for the country, having its beginnings only after the 1990s and, as evidence suggests, has spread at an alarming rate in many restaurants and cafés across Albania. As of 2014, 46 illegally kept captive bears have been documented and the total estimate is up to 60 animals (Trajçe et al. 2014b). Captive bears are usually taken from the wild as cubs – after their mother is poached – and are then sold for relatively high sums of money, from 250 – 600 euros per bear cub

(Trajçe et al. 2013). This practice of actively removing reproductive females from the wild, risks activating a proper population "sink" (Milner et al. 2007) and threatens the survival of brown bears in Albania.

Lynx

Lynx in Albania are part of the critically endangered Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*) population distributed in the southwest Balkan Peninsula (mainly in Macedonia and Albania, with possible presence in Kosovo and Montenegro) and whose total population is estimated at fewer than 50 individuals in total (Melovski et al. 2014, 2015). Since 2006, an international conservation project – the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme – has been active, aiming at lynx conservation through research, awareness raising and nature protection activities (Breitenmoser et al. 2008). Extensive field research through questionnaire surveys and camera-trapping (Fig. 1.6) have helped to improve the knowledge of Balkan lynx distribution and population status in Albania and neighbouring countries in recent years (Trajçe et al. 2009a).

Fig. 1.6. Camera-trap photo of a Balkan lynx (Lynx lynx balcanicus) in Munella mountain ©PPNEA/BLRP

Past evaluations (von Arx et al. 2004) have distinguished four nuclei of lynx distribution in Albania: 1. Albanian Alps, 2. Central North & Central, 3. Central East and 4. Central South. These nuclei, considered in terms of sub-populations, are no longer realistic, as recent extensive investigations have failed to prove permanent presence of lynx in the Albanian Alps region and Central South. To date, lynx presence in Albania has been documented through camera-trapping only in two mountain regions (Fig. 1.7): (i) Munella Mountain and surroundings in North Albania and (ii) Shebenik-Jabllanica National Park, East Albania (Trajçe et al. 2014a; Trajçe & Hoxha 2011, 2012). Through individual coat-recognition and comparison, a small sub-population of Balkan lynx, consisting of at least 5-6 individuals, has

been proven to exist in Munella mountain and at least 1-2 individuals in Shebenik-Jabllanica National Park (Trajçe et al. 2014a). In 2015, the finding of two dead lynx cubs in the Munella mountain region proved the reproduction of this species in Albania (Hoxha et al. 2016) and to date Munella mountain is one of only two areas in the south-west Balkans, where Balkan lynx are known to reproduce; the other area being the Mavrovo National Park and surroundings in western Macedonia (Melovski et al. 2015). Experts' estimation for the entire lynx population in Albania is in the range of 5-10 individuals (Chapron et al. 2014, Kaczensky et al. 2013) making it the most endangered mammal species in the country.

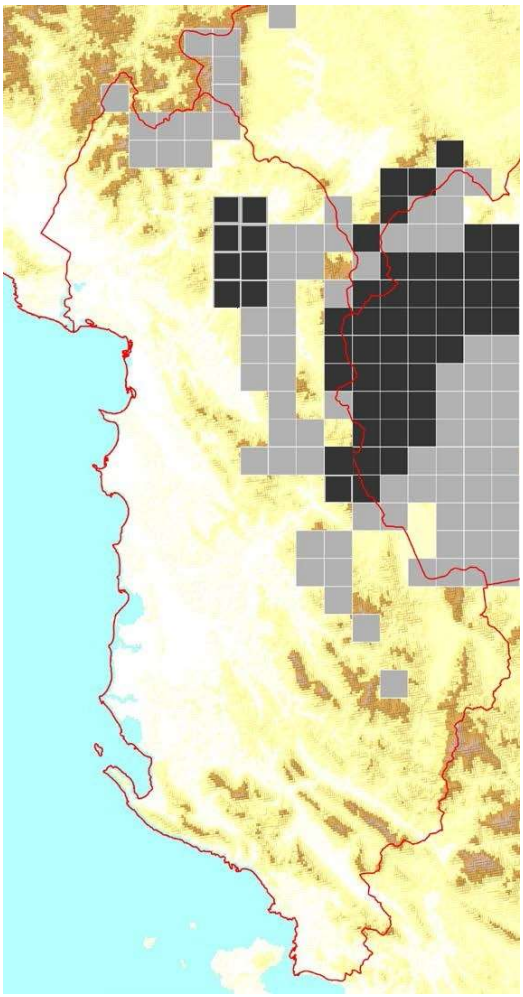

Fig. 1.7. Lynx distribution in Albania (updated from Kaczensky et. al. 2013).
Dark cells indicate core and reproduction areas with permanent presence, light grey cells peripheral areas of occurrence. Cells are 10x10 km.

The lynx is a strictly protected species in Albania. It is classified as Critically Endangered (CR) on the Albanian Red List of Flora and Fauna (Ministry of Environment 2013). Its hunting is prohibited, as sanctioned in the law on Wildlife Protection (2008) and law on Hunting (2010). The species has had a non-game status – hence being protected from hunting – at least since 1969. In the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (Bego & Koni 1999) the lynx is defined as a priority species for conservation, with the recommendation of developing a conservation action plan as an immediate task. In 2007 an action plan was compiled (Bego 2007b) and adopted by the Ministry of Environment in Albania. Subsequently, within the frame of the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme, a range-wide strategy for the conservation of Balkan lynx has been developed, followed by country-specific Action Plans for both Albania and Macedonia. These documents have been adopted and ratified by the Council of Europe and provide the basis for current and future actions with regard to lynx conservation and management in the range countries (Balkan Lynx Strategy Group 2008).

Lynx are not regarded as a major source of conflict among the rural population. This is probably due to the rarity and cryptic nature of the species and to the fact that lynx remain largely unknown among locals in the country. Questionnaire surveys conducted with the local rural population during 2006-07 indicate that lynx depredation is a very rare phenomenon, with lynx rarely taking sheep and goats (Keçi et al. 2008, Trajçe et al. 2008). There are no current or historical accounts of lynx attacking people in Albania, which is consistent with the rest of their distribution range in Europe (Breitenmoser & Breitenmoser-Würsten 2008). A human dimension study recently aimed at uncovering public attitudes among the rural population towards large carnivores reveals that the general opinion towards lynx is predominantly positive and support for their conservation is the highest among all carnivores (Trajçe 2010).

Notably, this support seems to stem from a small portion of the population that have knowledge of the lynx as a species, but, as studies show that they remain relatively unknown among the general population (Trajçe 2010, Trajçe et al. 2008). It is sometimes assessed that the lynx's cryptic nature can lead to the development of negative beliefs and attitudes, as is the case in the neighbouring country, Macedonia (Lescureux et al. 2011a).

Lynx in Albania, and more generally in the Balkans, are at an historical low level (Bego 2005, Breitenmoser-Würsten & Breitenmoser 2001, Melovski et al. 2015). Illegal killings, loss of prey base and habitat degradation seem to be the main factors that have led to the drastic decrease and almost-extinction of the Balkan lynx in the country (Ivanov et al. 2008, Trajçe et al. 2009a). Extensive field research through camera-trapping from 2009-14 has produced a substantial amount of photographic evidence of their presence in Munella mountain and Shebenik-Jabllanica National Park; however, at the same time, they illustrate the critical status of their population in Albania (Trajçe et al. 2014a, Trajçe & Hoxha 2012).

Wolf

Wolves in Albania are known to be distributed in almost all mountainous areas of the country. They are found across habitats covering hilly, mountainous and alpine zones in the northern, eastern, south-eastern and south-western parts of the country and are missing only from the highly human populated coastal and lowland areas in the west (Fig. 1.9). The Albanian wolf population is part of the larger Dinaric-Balkan population that spreads across the Balkan Peninsula (Kaczensky et al. 2013).

Proper monitoring of, and research on, wolves in Albania has been largely lacking in the past, thus information on their numbers is mostly based on expert estimations (Bego et al. 2002, Boitani 2000). In the past eight years, more solid information on wolf presence has been

collected, mainly through the work of research and conservation projects undertaken by non-profit organisations. Recent surveys through the use of camera-traps (Fig. 1.8), tracking and sign identification as well as systematic questionnaires with local populations, have generated substantial knowledge on the distribution and status of wolves in the country (Ivanov et al. 2008; Trajçe et al. 2008, 2014b; Trajçe & Hoxha 2012) as well as investigating existing conflicts with humans and people's attitudes towards wolves (Keçi et al. 2008, Trajçe 2010). Experts estimate that 200 – 250 wolves are likely to be present within their distribution areas in Albania (Chapron et al. 2014, Kaczensky et al. 2013).

Fig. 1.8. Camera-trap photo of a grey wolf (Canis lupus) in Shebenik-Jabllanica National Park ©PPNEA/BLRP

The wolf is a protected species in Albania. It is classified as Near Threatened (LR/nt) in the most recent Albanian Red List of Flora and Fauna (Ministry of Environment 2013). The Wildlife Protection (2008) and Hunting (2010) laws prohibit wolf hunting in Albania. However, killing/hunting of wolves may be allowed by special permission of official authorities in cases of problematic wolves (i.e. high levels of damage to livestock, immediate threat to people, etc.). The species has had a non-game (and non-pest) status since 1994. Prior to 1994, during the decades of communist rule, wolves were heavily persecuted in Albania and there were eradication programmes in place involving regular poisoning and bounty hunting (Bego 2005, Bego et al. 2002).

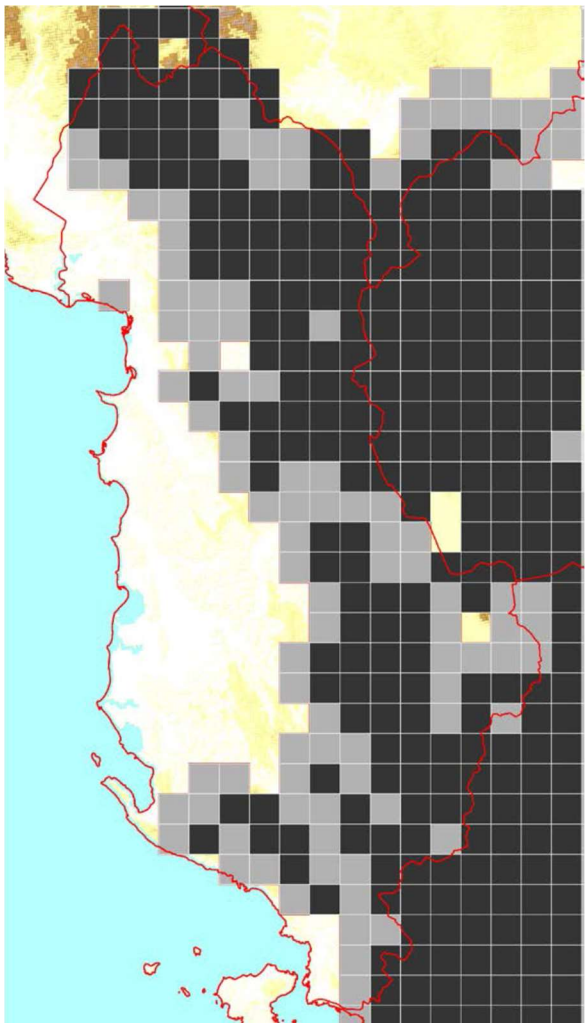

Fig. 1.9. Wolf distribution in Albania (from Kaczensky et. al. 2013).
Dark cells indicate core and reproduction areas with permanent presence, light grey cells peripheral areas of occurrence. Cells are 10x10 km.

In the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (Bego & Koni 1999) the wolf is selected as a priority species for conservation and the development of an action plan is recommended as an immediate action to take. However, to date, there is no official plan for the management and conservation of wolves in Albania.

Wolves are depicted as the most problematic species among all large carnivores in Albania (Keçi et al. 2008, Trajçe et al. 2008). Human-wolf conflicts seem to be widespread across all their distribution range. Wolves have been consistently reported to predate on small and large livestock as well as on shepherd and hunting dogs (Keçi et al. 2008, Trajçe et al. 2008). Of all the large carnivore species, the public perceptions of, and attitudes towards, wolves seem to be the most negative. Wolves seem to be the least tolerated large carnivore species and support for their conservation is significantly lower than for bear and lynx (Trajçe 2010).

The most evident threats to wolves' survival seem to be habitat destruction and fragmentation and human persecution; however, little is still known about the extent and magnitude of these threats. There are no systematic data on the number of individual wolves killed per year, as the species is protected by law; however, there are consistent indications that wolves are often victims of retaliatory killing due to livestock damage they cause to local people (Bego et al. 2002, Trajçe et al. 2008).

1.5. Fieldwork set-up

The starting point and motivation for this research project occurred during my involvement with the local environmental non-profit organisation, PPNEA. I started my collaboration with

it in 2004, initially as a volunteer and, from 2006, as a full-time wildlife researcher. I had developed initial ideas for such a project during my work at PPNEA and materialised them with the start of my doctoral programme at the University of Roehampton. As a member of PPNEA, and having contributed for almost a decade to its development, I was offered the use of the organisation's resources as help for conducting this research study, particularly for the fieldwork component.

I was based in three main locations for the duration of the field survey in Albania; (i) the central office of PPNEA in Tirana, (ii) a field station in Reps, Mirditë near the Munella Mountain and (iii) a field station in Librazhd town, near Shebenik-Jabllanica National Park. Both field stations consisted of accommodation facilities rented by PPNEA for prolonged periods of time as part of their ongoing camera-trapping monitoring work on the Balkan lynx and other wildlife in Albania. This work is conducted within the framework of the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme (Breitenmoser et al. 2008, Trajçe et al. 2009b). It was partly due to PPNEA's involvement in these two regions that they were selected as study areas for my ethnographic survey. For a substantial part of my fieldwork, particularly during the duration of the wildlife monitoring season conducted by PPNEA between December 2013 and May 2014, I synchronised my presence in the field with the activities of colleagues at PPNEA and this gave me the opportunity to use the field accommodation and infrastructure provided by the organisation. In doing so, I was also able to help colleagues at PPNEA with camera-trapping monitoring and, in return, they assisted me on several occasions throughout the process of field interviews and observations. Moreover, PPNEA's contribution was very useful in allowing me to keep up with relevant literature, and also digitise materials collected in the field, through the provision of a designated space at their office in Tirana.

After the camera-trapping season ended, and up to the end of my stay in Albania (from May to October 2014), I continued to use and pay for the sites myself when travelling to the regions. My usual weekly schedule in this period was to spend three or four days in one area, return for a couple of days in Tirana and repeat this schedule for the other area the following week.

Being affiliated with PPNEA, I was able to identify local collaborators and facilitators among the organisation's extended network of collaborators throughout the country. These facilitators proved to be crucial for easier access to the locals within the study areas, as well as directing me to particular people of relevance for the research. I was in close collaboration with Fatmir Brazhda, a forester from Librazhd who helped facilitation within Shebenik-Jabllanica National Park and Ilir Shyti, a forester from Gjegjan Commune who helped facilitation in the Munella mountain area. Both foresters are well-known locally and with extended personal and professional connections in their respective areas. PPNEA had formerly established collaborations with them through the various initiatives and projects implemented in their respective regions and because of their extended knowledge of, and care for, the natural environments they are responsible for. Moreover, Fatmir was appointed Chief of Protected Areas for the county of Elbasan – which includes Shebenik-Jabllanica National Park – in February 2014, and this increased even further his professional status within the region, and in turn this helped me to achieve even greater access in the region.

In retrospect, having had these two local facilitators was what probably determined the quality of the materials collected during the fieldwork survey and ensured a more efficient use of time. I judge their contribution and help as very useful for two main reasons: (i) they provided me access to the respective communities in the study areas and gave extensive assistance while conducting fieldwork within the regions. Having discussed at length with them the purpose of

my research, they were able to better guide and introduce me to key local participants, shepherds, hunters, foresters and others with whom I could conduct fruitful interviews and discussions. It would have taken me much more time and effort to find and address useful participants for my survey, had it not been for the help of Fatmir and Ilir; (ii) by being themselves locals from the areas I was surveying, they were also, in a way, long-term participants in my exploration. We were often involved in discussions related to their professional life as foresters in these areas, experiences in nature, forests and with large carnivores. Most importantly, observing how Fatmir and Ilir interacted with other locals respectively in Shebenik and Munella extended my knowledge of local customs, traditions, rules, social hierarchies and the general social organisation of these areas. This knowledge helped me immerse myself better with the local cultural context and fit more quickly into the communities I was studying.

1.6. Tools and materials

I realised early on, during the development stages of my research project, that I would not need much, in terms of equipment, to conduct my ethnographic field survey. First and foremost, I needed to have basic tools to keep track of and record information from discussions and observations as quickly as possible and therefore, constantly kept a field notebook with me. Besides this, I always kept a digital voice-recorder (Olympus VN-711PC) with me, in case of the opportunity to conduct more formal and structured interviews based on a questionnaire approach.

To record visual images, landscapes, activities in nature and signs of large carnivore or other wildlife presence, I used a compact digital camera (Sony Cybershot HX50 20MP). Both the recorder and digital camera were property of PPNEA and they were provided to me to use for the purposes and duration of fieldwork. In addition, to record exact locations of wildlife signs (tracks, marks, scats, etc.), large carnivore depredation incidences, and any other observations of interest made during the field survey, I used a Garmin GPSmap 60 provided by the University of Roehampton.

My initial plan for transportation to and within the study areas was to use PPNEA's field cars, given that PPNEA colleagues were going to conduct wildlife monitoring in these areas anyway. However, due to the systematic nature of such monitoring, which required regular checks of camera-traps on exact locations every 10 to 14 days, and the need of colleagues to have the cars for accessing remote areas often far away from villages and people, I quickly realised that to have increased mobility necessary for my research, I would need a personal vehicle. Given the poor road infrastructure of my focus areas, this needed to be a sports utility vehicle with four-wheel drive. Through the help of colleagues and friends, I acquired a second-hand Mitsubishi Pajero Pinin in December 2013.

Owning a personal vehicle very quickly became an essential element of my field research. It substantially increased my freedom of mobility in the field, allowing access to remote villages as well as summer shepherd locations in high mountain pastures. Most importantly and unexpectedly, the car proved to be an excellent facility for collecting information from locals. As there is almost no or very limited public transport in these regions, it is quite common for local people to hitchhike from one place to another within their region and it is a custom – or almost an obligation – among drivers to stop and offer a ride; a custom that I also complied

with whilst in the field. This was an advantageous method for acquiring extra information, as I would engage in conversations with passengers while giving them a lift from one village to the other, or to the nearest town. Poor road infrastructure also meant that trips would sometimes last for several hours and having these bonus participants made for a more efficient use of travel time on many occasions.

1.7. Profile of participants

My ethnographic exploration was directed towards the human groups that are most closely associated with large carnivores in Albania. I focused on local people who live near large carnivores' habitats and share the same environments with them. I identified the following as target groups for my research: (i) shepherds and livestock breeders, (ii) foresters (wardens and managers), (iii) hunters and (iv) farmers. On occasion, but to a more limited extent, I also addressed bee-keepers, wild plant and mushroom collectors and local officials. A major limitation was the lack of women as participants in my study due to the patriarchal social system characterising these areas of Albania, which results in women spending most of their time in, or very close to, the family home. Therefore, the people I addressed from the above-defined groups were almost entirely men, with very few women participants (the latter only among categories of shepherds and farmers). I explain this limitation in more detail at a subsequent section (1.10. Ethnography at home).

These groups were selected on the premise that by living and working near or in large carnivore habitats they have higher interactions with these animals in nature. In addition, large carnivores directly affect, damage and pose threats to the livelihoods of these people more than any other

groups in Albania. The rationale behind this is that narratives told by them provide a more detailed understanding of human-large carnivore relations in place (Ingold 2000). Shepherds, foresters, hunters and farmers represent the main bulk of rural communities in Munella mountain and Shebenik-Jabllanica National Park. Rural communities, particularly those in remote highland areas, are by far the most poverty-stricken in Albania, characterised by a subsistence-level farming and traditional husbandry practices (Mathijs & Noev 2004, Mavromati et al. 2011). Almost every family in these areas owns a few acres of arable land, has a few livestock and engages in a wide range of agricultural activities that could encompass most of the categories mentioned above. Given this, at times, the categorisation of participants within single profiles of shepherds, hunters or farmers was not clear-cut as even single individuals could engage in more than one such activity. There were many cases of locals who engaged in crop farming, shepherding, hunting, fishing, keeping beehives, collecting wild plants and other village activities. Nonetheless, in the following paragraphs I provide a brief description of each profile, while also acknowledging and describing these blurred distinctions in between them at the end.

Shepherds

There were two categories of shepherds whom I observed and interacted with: (i) occasional day shepherds and (ii) professional *stani* shepherds. Day shepherds are usually villagers whose main occupation is not livestock husbandry but who engage with such practices on an occasional basis either as part of a family or village system rota. A characteristic of these shepherds is that they own a small, usually family-based, flock of livestock which they graze only in the surroundings of the village. Alternatively, they could be grazing a collective flock from the village with animals belonging to different families, including their own. These

shepherds never venture too far away from the village and usually graze the animals on the surrounding agricultural areas, meadows and scrublands.

Professional shepherds, on the other hand, are transhumance-like shepherds whose full- time occupation and main source of income is livestock husbandry. These shepherds have a life cycle that is organised around livestock keeping. They usually own a large number of livestock that they move from lower altitudes in winter to higher altitudes in summer. Alternatively, they can be hired by a village to collectively keep the entire village's livestock (often including their own sheep as well) in one large flock in such a transhumance fashion. Professional shepherds live and work in high mountain pastures throughout the summer, in settlements that are specifically built for the purposes of livestock husbandry. These settlements are known in Albania as *stani* and usually consist of a summer hut or small house located on highland pastures, usually above the treeline or at the forest-pasture borderlands, and adjacent pens for gathering the sheep at night (Fig. 1.10). Shepherds live and work in *stani*-s usually from May to October by focusing on livestock grazing, milking and cheese producing. At times, and especially if whole families move up to the *stani*, they also engage in a few agricultural activities, such as planting potatoes and corn around the *stani*. *Stani-s* are remnants of a widespread transhumance system that was largely distributed across Albania (and the wider Balkans), particularly prior to 1950s. *Stani* shepherds were some of the main focus people for my research as they live and keep livestock for prolonged periods of time within areas considered as prime habitats for large carnivores.

Fig. 1.10. Typical 'stani' set-up in northern Shebenik, with pen enclosures to keep livestock during the night and small huts where shepherds and other people helping in the stani, live during summer months.

Foresters

Foresters were among the first groups that I focused on mostly because they were the easiest to be identified and addressed. Here, I define as foresters the people who are employed by the state institutions responsible for the protection and management of forests in both of my study areas. I do not include people who work in forests for reasons of exploitation, i.e. loggers. I did not interact with professional loggers during my ethnographic exploration, due to the fact that Shebenik-Jabllanica is a protected area and logging activities are prohibited and in Munella there is only one company with a legal concession for logging. However, it was difficult to contact and speak with them because their headquarters is in Shkodra – a city relatively far from the area – and the workers they employed were not locals from Munella. Illegal loggers,

on the other hand, were difficult to find and identify and I deliberately chose to not address them for safety reasons and to avoid potential conflict situations while conducting fieldwork.

Foresters in Albania are organised under government institutions called Directorates of Forestry Service (DFS). There is a directorate in every city or town that serves as a district centre and each directorate has the entire district's forest areas under management. For the purposes of my research I focused on the DFS of Fushë-Arrëz (Puka) and Rrësheni (Mirdita) which had responsibility over forest areas of Munella Mountain and DFS of Librazhd – which had responsibility for Shebenik-Jabllanica National Park. There were two main categories of foresters whom I interviewed and with whom I discussed issues: (i) forestry officials and (ii) forest wardens and inspectors. Forestry officials have mainly managerial and clerical duties at the offices of DFS, where they work full time. Their contact with the field is limited and they mostly live in the respective towns where their DFS is located. Forest wardens and inspectors, on the other hand, are required to be present in the field for surveillance and guarding purposes. They usually live in the nearest village to their designated surveillance area. I note here that foresters were probably the target group that were the most educated among all participants. Forest wardens are required to have a specialised secondary level education and forestry officials all have a university degree, usually in forest management.

Hunters

Even though hunters were an initial obvious choice to address during my survey, given their high interaction with wildlife and time spent in nature, it was, at times, difficult to establish what constitutes a hunter in Albania. A large number of people in rural areas own hunting guns, the country is generally defined as having a 'gun culture' (Gounev et al. 2006, Skendaj 2004) and cases of illegal gun ownership are frequent (Henley 2003). It is quite common for locals

who dwell in natural habitats to carry a hunting gun (or other types of guns) with them, be it legally or illegally owned. During the course of my field exploration I distinguished two categories of people that practice hunting in the regions: (i) opportunistic hunters and (ii) organised hunters. Opportunistic hunters are locals who do not engage in hunting activities on a regular basis or in an organised fashion through a network of hunters. In most cases they are people who own a gun, which they occasionally use for hunting. For instance, this applies to some *stani* shepherds who carry a gun with them while grazing the sheep. The gun's main use is for flock protection against predators; however, it is also common practice to shoot other wildlife species if encountered by chance in nature.

Organised hunters on the other hand, are locals who engage in hunting activities based on a conventional sport hunting practice. I include here hunters who claimed to be members of locally organised hunting associations and paid the necessary membership and hunting fees. Their motivation for hunting seemed to be mostly recreational, not of necessity or opportunity, and they demonstrated a genuine hobby interest in this practice. In contrast with opportunistic hunters, who were mainly villagers, organised hunters were urbanites living in towns near Munella (Pukë, Fushë-Arrëz and Rrëshen) and Shebenik (Librazhd, Përrenjas and Elbasan). Their occupations varied, and again in contrast to opportunistic hunters, they were mainly employed in non-agricultural jobs.

Farmers

Virtually all villagers within a work-force age who live in highland Albania are involved in varying degrees of farming and agricultural activities. Agriculture is the main economy sector in Albania, accounting for 58 per cent of all employment and contributing 21 per cent of the country's GDP (World Bank 2013). In the areas of Munella and Shebenik-Jabllanica, as in

much of highland Albania, agricultural land and farms were transferred for use to local families, following the post-communist agricultural reforms of the 1990s. In the communist era, farms were state-owned and villagers were not allowed to have private land (Swinnen et al. 1997). Currently, farmers in both study areas cultivate small parcels of arable land with conventional cereals such as wheat, corn and oats. Fruit trees and vineyards are more common in the Munella area, due to warmer climatic conditions, whereas in higher parts of Shebenik-Jabllanica, potato cultivation had prevalence. Most of the villagers with whom I interacted in villages, in local cafes and restaurants, and in farmed land around villages, were engaging in crop production and would classify themselves as farmers, or were partially involved with farming activities. In general, in Albania being a villager is directly associated with being a farmer.

Blurred categories

Having defined and described my main focus groups, I note that these categories are not to be taken as a strict division with the purposes of clustering each participant within one group or the other. Instead, they are intended to give an overview of the diversity of activities that take place in both study areas. Study participants often engaged in one activity more than the others, but still were involved in more than one. For instance, any given farmer would not necessarily limit their activities just to crop production, but would also engage in livestock keeping in most cases, thereby also fitting within the *occasional day shepherd* category defined above. On occasions, the same farmer might also be involved with hunting, therefore fitting also within the *occasional hunter* category. Cases of locals who actually specialise only in livestock husbandry or particular crop production were relatively rare, as most villagers engage in a combination of agricultural activities and livestock keeping. To best illustrate this, I give the

example of Gjoni[4], a local living in the village of Gurth-Spaç, at the foothills of Munella Mountain, who was one of my initial respondents in the survey and with whom I subsequently spent considerable amounts of time discussing in the field and in his home during my time in the region. Gjoni is the owner of some 80 goats and 12 cows. He has a *stani* on the higher meadows of Munella mountain and, depending on yearly weather conditions, he either leads his goats and cows up to the *stani* when summers are hot and dry and vegetation dries quickly at lower altitudes, or keeps them grazing around the village when summers are mild and humid and there is enough green vegetation throughout all the summer months. So he is both a *stani shepherd* and an *occasional shepherd* according to where and how he keeps and grazes his livestock. Gjoni is also a bee-keeper as he owns some twenty beehives in his house garden. He uses the honey for consumption within his family and sells the surplus to other locals and friends in his region and beyond. Gjoni's family also owns a few acres of land which they cultivate mostly with corn, making him a *farmer* as well. On top of these, Gjoni also owns a hunting gun and on occasions uses it for hunting, either while grazing livestock high up in the mountains, or as part of a social activity with friends. This made him an *occasional hunter* too.

1.8. Interviews, discussions and observations

On the whole, my research is largely based on a mixed-methods approach. I use the definition of Tashakkori & Teddlie (1998) on mixed methods, as referring to procedures of collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative information within the context of a single project.

[4] Real name of respondent has been changed for reasons of privacy.

The quantitative element of my research consists of a stratified random-sampling survey on people's attitudes towards large carnivores (Bath 1998) conducted in eastern Albania and western Macedonia between 2007 and 2009. This survey involved interviewing 759 locals in both countries about their attitudes and views related to large carnivores and issues of their management and conservation (Trajçe 2010). The research design and methodology for this survey is given in the respective chapter that is developed out of this information (Chapter 2) and therefore will not be presented here. In this section I focus on methodological aspects related solely to the ethnographic survey conducted within the timeline of my doctoral research project.

Due to my involvement in public attitudes surveys and other similar investigations in the past, the process of interviewing and questioning local people about wildlife and natural environments was not new to me. However, previous surveys were based on fixed-questions questionnaires; hence interaction with locals was limited to asking for answers to pre-defined questions. There was no requirement to engage any further with the locals, beyond their role in filling in the required questionnaire as participants in the respective surveys.

My intention in this study was to further explore local perceptions and attitudes towards large carnivores through a qualitative ethnographic approach developed out of recent human-wildlife studies and reviews. These recommend a combination of methodological approaches as being crucial for grasping and understanding complexities of human-wildlife conflicts and the extent to which the public shares similar or different views over wildlife (Baruch-Mordo et al. 2009, Linnell 2013). Quantitative surveys give an overview of a range of issues, conflicts, attitudes and perceptions over large carnivores. The qualitative element provides insights into how these attitudes and perceptions are developed as well as helps uncover relevant hidden

issues, which, because of their methodological limitations, might be missed by the quantitative surveys.

Driscoll et. al. (2007) describe two mixed-methods research designs for data collection: (i) concurrent design, in which qualitative and quantitative information is collected simultaneously and address the same issue in both components; (ii) sequential design, in which the data collected in one phase can contribute to the data collected in the next. In particular, sequential designs in which the quantitative data are collected first can use their findings to determine where to focus next with the qualitative element (Driscoll et al. 2007). In this respect, my data collection follows a sequential mixed-method approach, in which previously collected quantitative information from the survey in 2007-2009 brought insights and directions for the qualitative ethnographic exploration that I conducted from October 2013 to October 2014.

Despite my previous experience with quantitative questionnaire surveys, engaging in an ethnographic exploration of these locals was a completely new endeavour for me. Given this, the initial months of fieldwork posed some difficulties while learning and adapting to these new methods of collecting information. In many occasions I felt disoriented, not knowing whether I was taking the right approach, addressing the right people or asking the right questions. Discussions with locals felt at times forced and uncomfortable and I had no way of judging the relevance of different directions in which discussions often headed. Given my previous experience, I started off fieldwork by conducting interviews with locals through a list of semi-structured and open ended questions. This approach gave me a sense of control and security and made sure that the discussion would centre mostly on large carnivores and interactions with them, without going too much off-topic.

My initial targets were forest wardens and forest officials working in the areas of Munella and Shebenik mountains. They were the easiest to access at first, because of existing connections that my home organisation, PPNEA, had created with forestry services across the country from collaborations in various conservation projects over the years. Moreover, given that foresters are organised under Directorates of Forestry Service as described above, they had fixed locations and offices, which made them easier to find and meet.

A semi-structured questionnaire format seemed to work well with the foresters. They showed themselves to be familiar with the process of an interview and were in general very eager to show their knowledge of the area, forests, wildlife and large carnivores. On most occasions, foresters were also quite comfortable with being recorded with a voice recorder as well, which made the process of note keeping easier and allowed me to focus more on the details of the discussion. Similarly, this semi-structured questionnaire format was also useful when addressing organised and legal hunters, presumably also because of their higher education level.

Even though I adopted a more formal interviewing style in the beginnings, I did not strictly stick to questions I had pre-defined, but changed them and added other questions depending on how the conversation developed. Having a semi-structured guide helped to cover most topics of interest and in general to keep the discussion mostly on issues of large carnivores; however, if the discussion took an interesting direction I would follow that path with other questioning, or simply by letting the respondent talk without interruption. Usually such interviews would last for a period of 50 minutes to one hour; however, on occasions they could go for longer, especially if transformed into more relaxed and informal discussions. These conversations usually took place in town cafés or forestry offices.

I soon realised that using semi-structured questionnaires and voice-recording was not always an adequate method, particularly when addressing shepherds and farmers. I frequently observed that most participants within these groups felt uneasy at the sight of questionnaire papers and when I asked for permission to record. Even when agreeing to be recorded, I noticed that discussions would often be very rigid and not fluent. Participants would carefully select what (and what not) to say, never talk more beyond answering a question asked and on occasions try too hard to sound smart and intelligent. I feared that such behaviours would limit the collection of relevant information and decided to adapt my note taking methods according to the situation presented. On occasions, I would simply write quick notes in my notebook during the discussion and when even this proved to make participants uncomfortable, I simply switched to a normal conversational mode and tried to memorise the most relevant points that arose. I then wrote down these 'mental notes' in my field notebook as soon as possible after the discussion had ended.

Another common form of interaction with locals was group discussions, particularly in village cafés. There were two forms of group discussions that I engaged in: (i) pre-organised group discussions and (ii) spontaneous discussions. Organised group discussions were largely facilitated by my local collaborators in Shebenik and Munella. My collaborators would often take the lead in calling and inviting selected people from the village – people who they deemed to have a more extensive knowledge of wildlife and nature – to have a coffee together and discuss on large carnivores, wildlife and nature issues. Spontaneous discussions would often happen when venturing into village cafés. Cafés are central to the social life of locals, who spend a considerable amount of their time during the day and most of the evenings in these places. As outsiders are not a common occurrence in either of the study areas, it was usual that

when I, and my respective collaborator, ventured into a village café, we immediately attracted the attention of all the customers there. Most of the time locals were quite curious about the motivations and reasons for my presence in their locality and, after learning of my intentions and interests in studying large carnivores, they would spontaneously gather around our table to talk about personal experiences with large carnivores and wildlife in their area.

I observed that in such circumstances (whether organised or spontaneous), writing my notes directly during the discussion was easier than during one-on-one conversations, given that there were intervals of cross-communication among locals where I would not get involved. Such a format seemed to fit well with what locals were already doing in cafés and having interested people like us listening to, and keeping track of their stories, made them even more eager to engage in conversations and share personal experiences.

A substantial amount of my fieldwork time was spent in discussions with shepherds and livestock breeders and observing their daily activities in nature. I adopted a participant observation approach for such an exploration. I would spend entire days with shepherds in the field engaging in discussions about various topics on livestock keeping and noting down their activities and work procedures. This part of my research occurred mostly between May and October 2014 as livestock grazing is practiced more intensively and regularly during summer months. Due to harsh climatic conditions and snowfalls over winter, livestock are usually kept in barns, pens and enclosures near or inside villages and are fed with plant fodder collected over the previous spring and summer and with supplementary oats. There is occasional grazing during winter, particularly when weather conditions permit it; however, this usually happens at lower altitudes during snow-free periods and even then livestock have to be supplementary fed with stored hay and fodder due to lack of fresh plant matter. As defined in the previous

section, the two categories of shepherds I focused on were daily shepherds and professional shepherds. I usually encountered daily shepherds whilst they were grazing sheep in the surroundings of a village. Professional shepherds, on the other hand, live and work in *stani-s* located in highland mountain pastures and I would usually drive up to there to spend a whole day with them and return to the nearest village or field station for the evening.

In summary, I used a combination of (i) semi-structured interviews, (ii) group discussions and (iii) participant observation throughout the duration of my fieldwork. I adapted and chose to use any of these methods in accordance with the situation presented and by judging individual participants' profiles. The intention was to increase the quality of collected information by letting participants speak at their greatest convenience and to engage in daily activities without majorly influencing them.

1.9. Ethical issues

It is a requirement for securing research ethics approval at the University of Roehampton that researchers prepare written Participant Consent forms, explaining the nature of research, what the researcher is asking from each study participant, explaining they are free to withdraw at any point, and that the researcher guarantees their anonymity; these are scrutinised in the approval process. I prepared such a consent form and translated it in Albanian (see Appendix 8.2.). However, once in the field these forms often proved to be a bar to research and I sought to obtain consent in more informal ways. The main bar to the research was that many local people are suspicious of formal documents they are asked to sign because they are uncertain of, and concerned with, what signing implies for their involvement in bureaucratic, usually

governmental, processes that they do not fully understand. However, I was always mindful of the need to explain in very clear ways who I was, why I was interested in asking them questions and how that related to my academic study. Here I was following the guidelines of best practice set out by the Association of Social Anthropologists of UK and the Commonwealth (ASA 2011).

As I commented previously, I was well-known to many of those with whom I spoke because of my previous work with a local organisation and they were familiar with my interests in wildlife and livestock. Many of these respondents introduced me to other people, explaining to them who I was and the nature of my project. In particular, my two local collaborators in Munella and Shebenik, Ilir and Fatmir, were very helpful with such introductions. This form of introduction is a common local cultural practice based on systems of friendship, personal knowledge and confidence. An introduction by a known person to another vouches for, and establishes the grounds for, a relationship with an unknown person. In cases of chance encounters, I always explained myself and what it was that I was doing. It is also important to mention that I was not asking questions about potentially sensitive personal issues such as political views or anything relating to financial, economic or family matters. I did not attempt to interview women because, in the local social and cultural context, this would have been seen as at least problematic or even inappropriate because it would have involved an approach to domestic settings that are regarded as private. I explain this limitation in more detail in the next section (1.10 Ethnography at home). Overall, my questions and discussions related to knowledge, experiences and opinions of wildlife and the nature of local animal husbandry. In my experience and judgement this did not result in expressions of concern about my interests

or the nature of the project. Throughout the thesis I have maintained the anonymity of my respondents.

1.10. Ethnography at home

I set off to conduct fieldwork in a country where I was born and had lived for 28 years. Even though at the beginning of my fieldwork I did not take particular notice of this fact, I soon realised that I was in a somewhat peculiar position of conducting ethnographic research at home (Jackson 1987) as opposed to more classic approaches of anthropologists conducting work in countries with cultural contexts other than their own. Retrospectively, I realise that I faced many of the advantages and disadvantages that researchers working within their own countries and cultures face (Hastrup 1987, Strathern 1987). I summarise these in brief in the following paragraphs.

Firstly, I had a language advantage. I could easily communicate in my native language to other fellow countrymen, without needing to invest time in learning a language or using a translator. Strong local dialects sometimes proved to be challenging to understand even for me, particularly in the Munella mountain region, however, after a few months of presence this was overcome. Secondly, I had an extensive knowledge of the areas I was focusing on. Prior to this research project, I had been doing systematic fieldwork – albeit predominantly ecological in nature – for eight years in the northern and eastern mountains of Albania. I was well-acquainted with the terrain conditions and general geography of these areas and this made it easier to do fieldwork planning and implementing. Thirdly, I had an extended network of collaborators and acquaintances from my previous work experiences in the country. I received crucial help

through these connections, either in the forms of direct research assistance in the field or by helping with local facilitation and intercession. Lastly, given that Albania is my home country and I have worked in these areas for a substantial amount of time, I considered myself to already have a certain knowledge of the local context, traditions and culture. I hoped that this knowledge would prove advantageous when addressing, observing and understanding locals.

Paradoxically, sometimes it was some of these very advantages that would cause problems and limitations throughout my research and potentially even turn into disadvantages. The fact that I was an Albanian, who was trying to study and explore the livelihoods of other Albanians, did not seem particularly appealing or even convincing to many of my study participants. I had several cases of doubtful reactions to my seemingly naïve questions about, livestock keeping, farming and rural livelihoods in general. I was at times faced with the recurring reply of "*You know these things! [You are Albanian!]*", or an attitude that would express respondents doubts to the fact that I was asking questions which they deemed I knew the answers to already. This stance was enhanced by the fact that I, and my involvement in carnivore conservation, was already known by many members of these local communities due to my long-term involvement in the study areas through several PPNEA conservation projects and initiatives. I tried to overcome these issues and reduce potential biases coming out of them, by making clear my position as a researcher and openly informing every participant about my intentions and reasons behind this research. In addition, I had to reiterate on several occasions that I was coming from an urban background and that having been born in a city and lived in cities throughout all my life meant I had little knowledge of rural life.

As much as there were benefits to having family, friends and connections in my home country, there were also disadvantages related to them. Staying in Albania for a whole year of fieldwork

also meant that, occasionally, I needed to engage in social events and family obligations that took me away from my field sites. On the whole, I do not judge these as being particularly or majorly detrimental to my field research. However, on several such occasions I noted to myself, that if I were conducting the same research in any other country other than my own, events such as friends' birthdays or relatives' weddings would have not been issues to keep me away from fieldwork for a day or two.

In addition to the above, there were country-specific issues and developments that occurred within the fieldwork period which had an influence on the implementation of my research. One of the major limitations faced was lack of interaction with local women and their involvement as participants in my study. Rural areas of Albania, particularly northern regions, are known for their strong patriarchal societies (Young 2002). Women and girls living in villages are often confined indoors and doing household chores. Among outdoor activities, they are involved in crop production and plant collection and to a limited extend with sheep herding (although only as daily village shepherds, almost never as shepherds up in the *stani*-s). There are virtually no women that practice hunting in rural Albania. Due to local rules and traditions, the act of a man addressing an unknown woman in public, without the consent or presence of their husband or father is highly unusual and could be considered an offense from the male figures mentioned. Such situations could potentially lead to conflictive situations and deterioration of relationships with locals. Given this social condition, the representation of women participants in my study is very low. The few women I addressed were mostly the ones present in group discussion circumstances when men related to them (father, husband, other male relatives) were also present or when visiting village households and discussing with inhabiting families as a group.

Two institutional government developments that occurred while I was conducting fieldwork in Albania influenced and limited, to varying degrees, the implementation of my research. Firstly, there was a major reform that occurred in the forest management sector and influenced the structure of districts' forestry services. In February 2014, the newly elected Albanian government decided to abolish the old system of Directorates of Forestry Services on a district level and instead centralised the management of forests on a county level – counties being larger administrative units that encompass several districts. Many district directorates, including those of Librazhd, Puka and Rrëshen where I was focusing, were left functioning only as local offices with a reduced staff and management capacity. With this new change, I often had to travel to the new directorate centres in county seats (respectively in Elbasan and Shkodër) to address the needed participants. In addition, as this reform raised great discontent among many foresters who were left jobless, many of the discussions I had around that period, were often focusing on this reform and the overall objections or dissatisfactions that foresters had towards it.

Secondly, in March 2014 the Albanian government declared a hunting moratorium - a total hunting ban in the country for a period of two years (White 2014). This decision was intended to fight increased poaching that had been going on in Albania for more than two decades, resulting in fauna devastation and endangerment of many wildlife species. While I personally applauded this decision as a much needed one for the recovery of Albanian wildlife, it meant that I could not engage in participant observation activities with hunters during the process of hunting, as one of the potential local activities that required ethnographic attention.

While both these developments posed some limitations to my initial research plans, they also provided new opportunities to discuss the respective topics from a different angle. For instance,

as Albania was the first and only country in the world to take such a drastic decision against hunting, this provided grounds for me to explore the hunters' and other participants' opinion about this unique case of hunting regulation. I carefully observed how the community of hunters reacted to the moratorium and had prolonged discussions with several of them on the advantages and disadvantages of such a decision.

1.11. Concluding remarks

The aim of this chapter has been to provide a detailed description of the study areas, large carnivores and local people who I targeted for my research, as well as the fieldwork process of this project. Key factors that guaranteed the progress of my field exploration were local facilitators in Munella and Shebenik and the continuous assistance provided by my home organisation, PPNEA. The decision to use a combination of semi-structured interviewing, group discussions and participant observation methods allowed me to be more versatile and flexible in the field, with the purpose of addressing research aims depending on the circumstances presented. Most importantly, fieldwork was crucial for heightening my appreciation of local rural livelihoods in general and human-wildlife interrelations in particular. I consider the time spent in the field was also a valuable training experience, as I noted a gradual increase in my abilities to address and interact with locals more adequately and efficiently throughout the progress of fieldwork. Undertaking an ethnographic exploration in my home country presented simultaneous challenges and opportunities, which ultimately helped me to understand fellow compatriots better, however it was, at the same time, also a journey of self-exploration within this context.

2. A quantitative perspective on public attitudes towards large carnivores in the south-west Balkans

Preface to Chapter 2

The following chapter explores rural attitudes towards large carnivores by using a quantitative 'human dimensions' approach (Manfredo et al. 1996), widely implemented for research on public attitudes towards wildlife across Europe (Dressel et al. 2015). The materials and data used in this chapter were generated from a stratified random sample questionnaire survey on people's attitudes towards large carnivores in Albania and Macedonia, conducted between 2007 and 2009. This work stems from my involvement at PPNEA and was conducted in the frame of the project "*Building capacity to meet the challenges of multi-level democracy: the case of conserving species with transboundary populations*" funded by the Research Council of Norway and coordinated by Dr John D.C. Linnell at the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA) and involving individuals and institutions from Albania, Macedonia and Slovenia. I was involved throughout the project (2006 – 2009) and was responsible for the collection and analysis of the Albanian data. The material formed the basis of my Master's thesis (University of Oxford, 2010) on rural attitudes of large carnivores in Albania (Trajçe 2010).

This chapter, structured differently from the others, has been written in a paper-style format with the text separated from the figures and tables (the latter listed at the end of the chapter), as it is intended for submission to the journal 'Biological Conservation' as an output of the aforementioned collaboration project. I have been

appointed as a lead author and have had the agreement of all project partners to include this study as an integral part of my research thesis. Besides myself, as the main responsible person for the data collection, management and interpretation of results, the following people have contributed towards the realisation of this study. The data analysis with regard to the model fitting and selection has been conducted by Dr Tomaž Skrbinšek from the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia. Drs. Aleksandra Majić and John D.C. Linnell have provided help and comments for the interpretation of results, as well as laid out the framework for the data collection procedure in the beginnings of the project. Besides myself, the following people have helped with data collection in Albania: Erjola Keçi, Olsi Qazimi, Indrit Kodra and Kujtim Mersini, whereas Dime Melovski, Gjorgi Ivanov, Aleksandar Stojanov, Aleksandra Todorovska and Sabit Mustafa have helped with data collection in Macedonia.

All carnivores are not equal in the public's view. Should we develop conservation plans for functional guilds or individual species in the face of conflicts?

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Abstract

We tested differences in attitudes towards bears, wolves and lynx among the rural public in Albania and Macedonia through information collected from a questionnaire survey between April 2007 and January 2009 (n = 759 questionnaires). Wolves were the species with the least positive attitudes among the rural public and had the lowest support for conservation compared with bears and lynx. In addition, conflict perception of wolves was higher than for bears and lynx. We argue that, based on differences in public attitudes, conservation initiatives and management plans for large carnivores should deal with wolves separately from bears and lynx, as lower public support for wolves might jeopardise the conservation of the two other large carnivores. Bears and lynx can be potentially treated together in conservation initiatives based on the similar levels of public support for conservation, however, from a conflict-management point of view, all three species need to be addressed separately.

Keywords: large carnivores, human–wildlife conflict, human dimensions, Albania, Macedonia

2.1. Introduction

Large carnivore conservation remains a challenging endeavour worldwide. Their large spatial requirements and conflicts with humans are the main challenges to overcome when it comes to long term conservation (Gittleman et al. 2001, Woodroffe & Ginsberg 1998). From an ecological perspective, carnivore conservation objectives should be set to ensure the viability of larger populations and thus require large areas to fulfil the species' ecological requirements. However, as humans have influenced and fragmented the majority of natural landscapes worldwide, setting aside areas of conservation large enough to sustain viable large carnivore populations proves to be a challenging endeavour, and is almost impossible, for many regions of the world (Linnell et al. 2005b, Woodroffe & Ginsberg 1998). In a European context, this approach is unrealistic, and conservation must instead rely on integrating large carnivores into multi-use landscapes (Chapron et al. 2014). Thus, the conservation ambitions for large carnivores in Europe are constrained by the fact that humans have modified the natural landscape for millennia and by the degree of acceptance that local human populations have for the presence of these species (Linnell et al. 2001). Large carnivores cause considerable economic damage throughout Europe, mainly due to livestock depredation (Kaczensky 1999), and they also sometimes represent a risk for human safety (Löe & Röskaft 2004). The presence of large carnivores in European landscapes is largely determined by peoples' acceptance and tolerance toward these issues. Conserving large carnivores in human dominated landscapes requires complementing classic conservation biology approaches (Carroll et al. 2001, Noss et al. 1996) with social science research which examines human acceptance and attitudes toward these species (Bath 1998, Decker et al. 2001, Manfredo et al. 1996), and integrating the latter in conservation strategies and programmes.

Within conservation biology there has been a developing trend for moving away from single-species conservation to more holistic, ecosystem approaches (Groom et al. 2006). The historical developments include ideas such as "ecosystem management", first raised in the United States (Christensen et al. 1996, Grumbine 1994) and the "ecosystem approach", first proposed by the Convention on Biological Diversity in its Malawi Principles (COP 1998). The motivation behind these frameworks is to rationalise the use of limited resources for conservation by focusing on entire ecosystems rather than single species (Christensen et al. 1996). This is further supported by the fact that many ecosystem elements either depend on, or interact with, one another and moreover, they provide a more practical approach for conservation. One way to rationalise this approach in animal conservation is to focus efforts on functional groups of animals or 'guilds' that given their ecological characteristics and functions, will theoretically ensure the protection of ecosystems at large (Lambeck 1997, Roberge & Angelstam 2004, Simberloff 1998). Large carnivores are a prime representation of this 'guild' approach. They have broadly similar requirements in terms of space and habitat and are often regarded as umbrella species for conservation (Carroll et al. 2001, Noss et al. 1996). Across the European continent there is a strong movement for the conservation of large carnivores as a group – grey wolves (*Canis lupus*), brown bears (*Ursus arctos*), Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) and wolverines (*Gulo gulo*) are often packaged together in conservation efforts and initiatives. The creation of the Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE; www.lcie.org), a specialist group of the IUCN Species Survival Commission, is in itself an expression of such a 'guild' focus with the vision to "*maintain and restore viable populations of large carnivores in European landscapes*" (LCIE 2013a). The action plans for the conservation of four large carnivore species in Europe that were produced by the LCIE under the auspices of the Bern

Convention, between 1998 and 2000, adopted a similar framework and approach for each of the species (Boitani 2000, Breitenmoser et al. 2000, Delibes et al. 2000, Landa et al. 2000, Swenson et al. 2000). These were followed by a guideline document for the management of large carnivore populations in Europe (Linnell et al. 2008) that is endorsed by the European Commission and provides guidance for the management of the big predators in a similar fashion between the different species. In addition, a multitude of environmental organisations across Europe base their awareness and fundraising activities on this large carnivore 'guild', and often implement projects aiming at the simultaneous conservation of all large carnivores (EAZA 2010, Kirby 1999, Salvatori 2013).

Conservation of large carnivores is, however, rarely a simple matter of addressing their ecological needs as their conservation success is mostly determined by people's acceptance and tolerance of these species and the conflicts that they cause (Linnell 2013, Treves & Karanth 2003). Opinions of large carnivores can vary according to a number of factors and variables, often linked to cultural, economic and social circumstances. These differentiations are widely noted even in historical literature and folklore. While wolves have been traditionally depicted as merciless beasts of destruction, evil creatures and are ever-present in legends and stories across the European continent (Marvin 2012), lynx are hardly talked about in a historical or cultural context and remain a poorly known species for most people (Breitenmoser & Breitenmoser-Würsten 2008). In addition, wolves and bears have a history of attacking and even killing people and have been feared for this reason, but there is hardly any evidence of lynx or wolverines attacking humans (Breitenmoser & Breitenmoser-Würsten 2008, Kruuk 2002, Linnell et al. 2002). Moreover, carnivores are not equal in the level of damage they can inflict on economic activities, with wolves being responsible for most losses of livestock and

bears causing more damage on crops and fruit trees (Andersen et al. 2003, Kaczensky 1999, Swenson & Andren 2005). Dingwall (2001), in a linguistic study on the use of the words "wolf", "bear" and "lynx", reveals that wolves are mostly associated with negative connotations and expressions, lynx are the least known and discussed, and bears, who are less negatively talked about than wolves, enjoy a more reputable image and are even sometimes referred to as affectionate or cuddly animals.

Lescureux and Linnell (2010) further argue that people have different perceptions of carnivore species and their characteristics, depending on the species' cultural history, ecology, the level of damage they cause and their level of interactions with humans.

Species differences in public attitudes could potentially represent a problem in the 'guild' approach for the conservation of large predators, as single members of the guild inspire different feelings among the public. Negative attitudes toward a particular species might negatively influence the public's view of the entire guild, including species that the public might not be particularly against or which may even be favoured for conservation.

This study seeks to explore the relative ranking of attitudes toward three species of large carnivores, namely wolves, bears and lynx, within a sample of the rural public in Albania and Macedonia who share their immediate environments with these species. The survey was conducted within the framework of a long term initiative for the conservation and recovery of the Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*), a critically endangered subspecies of the Eurasian lynx living mainly in these two countries (Breitenmoser et al. 2008, Breitenmoser-Würsten & Breitenmoser 2001, Trajçe et al. 2009a). A quantitative study based on the administration of a questionnaire survey was undertaken, aiming to collect information on people's perceptions of, and attitudes towards, the three species. Albania and Macedonia have no practice or

tradition of public involvement in issues of wildlife management and most of the decisions are based on expert input or political convenience without taking into account the opinion of the larger population or even that of concerned stakeholders. In this regard, this study is the first of its kind in the region and represents a new possibility for modernising wildlife management policies and decision-making processes in these two countries. This study is an exploration of the relative opinions of different species given by the same people within the same sample of the population. The specific hypothesis is to test whether public support and attitudes toward large carnivores differ considerably between the three species and the two countries. Based on the results, implications that might arise for current and future conservation and management approaches are discussed. However, the results are also interpreted in light of similar attitudinal studies that have been conducted in other parts of Europe, especially when it came to exploring the extent to which various individual characteristics (such as age, sex, education) influenced variation in general attitudes.

2.2. Materials and methods

Study area

The study area is located in the regions of eastern Albania and western Macedonia (Fig. 2.1). This area was selected because of the reported presence of all three large carnivores (Chapron et al. 2014, Ivanov et al. 2008, Kaczensky et al. 2013), and therefore provides higher chances for respondents to give opinions on all three species. While the brown bear and wolf are considered to have stable and somewhat large populations in both countries, the lynx is evaluated as critically endangered with very few individuals remaining (Tab. 2.1). The lynx in Albania and Macedonia are part of the remaining Balkan lynx population, estimated to be the most threatened indigenous population of Eurasian lynx in Europe, with no more than 40 mature individuals remaining (Melovski et al. 2015).

The survey was conducted in 32 municipalities in Albania and 29 in Macedonia. The cumulative study area in Albania had a population of 163,500 inhabitants (Institute of Statistics 2003) and 358,600 inhabitants in Macedonia (State Statistical Office 2007). These areas are predominantly rural, characterised by small villages scattered over a largely mountainous and forested landscape. The main human activities are farming, livestock breeding, forestry, collection of medicinal and aromatic plants and other forest products, and hunting. The most commonly kept livestock species are sheep and to a lesser extent cattle, goats, donkeys and horses. In recent decades these areas of Albania and Macedonia have been facing rural depopulation, with locals migrating out of the area towards big cities in the respective countries or even abroad. However, this abandonment occurred in different periods in the two countries; in Macedonia having its peak in 1950s and 1960s (Thomas 1982) and in Albania occurring

almost entirely after the collapse of the communist regime in 1990s (King & Vullnetari 2003). The physical landscape is characterised by agriculture fields in valley bottoms and around villages, forests on mountain slopes and alpine pastures and meadows at higher elevations. Agriculture and livestock breeding remain rather traditional and occur at a near subsistence level, particularly in Albania, where family-based agro-economies owning small plots of lands and small flocks of livestock prevail (Keçi et al. 2008, Kume et al. 2004).

Sampling frame and data collection

The questionnaire survey followed a framework proposed by Fowler (1993) and conventionally used in studies of public attitudes on large carnivores in Europe (Bath 2000, Bath et al. 2008, Majić & Bath 2010). Only residents 18 years and older were eligible to take part in the survey. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure a proportional representation of the population. A target sample of 400 questionnaires per country was chosen so as to ensure a 95% confidence level and 5% confidence interval (Sheskin 1985). In total ten interviewers (five in each country) helped in the data collection process, all of whom had received prior training for the survey. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and people were selected on a random approach after entering a given village – e.g. every third person encountered in the street. The field survey extended from April 2007 to January 2009.

Questionnaire structure

The survey instrument was a questionnaire developed out of similar research studies in other European countries (Bath et al. 2008, Bath & Majic 2001, Kaczensky et al. 2004). The questionnaire was adapted to Albanian and Macedonian conditions and was focused on the

three species of large carnivores present in these countries. Questions were organized around general topics such as attitudes, beliefs, knowledge of species, management, personal experiences and socio-demographic information. There were 46 questions in total, of which 24 were asked for all three large carnivore species, six were questions intended for measuring general environmental attitudes of participants, two were management-specific questions concerning respectively lynx and wolves, three questions focussed on related attitudes toward general societal issues and 11 were questions concerning background socio-demographic information and interviewees' profile (Questionnaire sample in Appendix 8.3). Attitudinal items were based on a 5-point Likert scale and scored from 1 (strongly disagree/dislike) to 5 (strongly agree/like).

Data analysis

All statistical analyses were done in the R statistical environment (Version 3.1.2, R Development Core Team 2014). Initially we reduced data among the attitudinal questions by performing a principal component analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation to summarise the types of attitudes measured by the questionnaire items. We used the functions in the R package *Psych* (Revelle 2014) for the PCA, and did the analysis for all three species together to enable comparisons. Based on a screeplot analysis, we extracted two factors that included the majority of variance in the data (fit = 0.94). We based the interpretation of these two factors on loadings of different variables (responses to specific questions) in each factor. Grouped in the first extracted factor were the responses to questions about *support for species conservation*. The second factor was interpreted as *perception as conflict species*, as it included the responses to questions about perception of large carnivores as dangerous and a threat to human livelihoods

(Tab. 2.2). We used these two factors (support for conservation score and conflict perception, hereinafter abbreviated as SC and CP) as response variables in the downstream analysis. To ease interpretation, we centred and scaled both factors on a scale -2 to 2, where 0 is "neutral" (all answers on the Likert scale).

We used linear mixed effects models with R package *nlme* (Pinheiro et al. 2014) to model the effects of independent variables on SC and CP scores. A set of models was fitted for each of these two factors as the response variables, with explanatory variables selected a-priori based on the existing knowledge and reasoning about their effects on the response variable (Burnham & Anderson 2002). Besides existing explanatory variables in the questionnaire, we created a knowledge score (0-15) for large carnivores as a new variable, by summing correct answers given by each respondent in regard to questions on ecology (weight, way of living, diet) and legal status (protection status, payment for compensation) of the three species in each country. Since there was no reason to expect a particular distribution for the response variables (and hence use an appropriate link function in a generalized linear model) we used the identity link (Gaussian errors) and transformed the response variable as required. While the CP score had a unimodal symmetrical distribution and didn't require a transformation, we inverted the data and used the lognormal transform for the SC score, and back-transformed the results for interpretation. Since the explanatory variables were selected a-priori based on our understanding of the questions, we fitted the full model set for these variables without interactions up to the number of parameters supported by the data. We used 40 data points per parameter as the criteria, where we considered each respondent as a data point. Since each respondent generated three records (one for a set of questions for each species) and these records were not independent, we included the respondent as a random effect variable fitted

into the intercept. We used diagnostic plots for the global model in R to check for heterogeneity, non-normality and model outliers. Clear model outliers were removed from the data and were not further explored since there were few. We checked for multicolinearity using Variance Inflation Factors. We checked for heterogeneity in the data by plotting residuals against fixed-effects variables, and included error structure in the model (Zuur et al. 2009). Since the variance for different species and genders varied, we included the correction in the model error structure using varIdent weights (Zuur et al. 2009). The models were ranked using the Second-order Information Criterion (AICc), and we used Akaike's weights to estimate the relative importance of each variable (Burnham and Anderson 2002). Among the models with the lowest that were within $\Delta AICc \leq 2$, we considered the models with the least parameters as the most parsimonious. These final models (Tab. 2.3) for both response variables were checked again for fit, and used for inference. Fitting of the full model set, estimation of variable importance and model averaging were done using the R package *MuMIn* (Bartoń 2014). The process of factors extraction and subsequent model selection are summarised in Appendix 8.3.

2.3. Results

Respondents' characteristics

In total, 759 people were interviewed during the survey, 397 in Albania and 362 in Macedonia. The original sampling design required that an equal number of men and women were to be interviewed for representation purposes. However, because of the conservative and patriarchal nature of societies in the region, it was not always possible to interview enough women, despite having female interviewers in each team. This resulted in a male bias among the respondents (76.9% men and 23.1% women). The bias was higher in Macedonia where only 15% of the respondents were women. The average age of respondents was 43.3 years (range 18-83) and among these the Macedonian sampled population was on average younger (40.5 years) than the Albanian one (45.8 years) [$t(757)=5.136$; $p<0.05$]. In respect to living place, the vast majority of respondents (94.6%) in both countries described themselves as being permanent inhabitants in their respective rural municipalities.

In Albania, livestock and beehive ownership was higher than in Macedonia, with the majority of the respondents claiming to own at least one head of livestock, whereas in Macedonia livestock ownership was rather limited to fewer people. Hunting was practiced by more respondents in Albania than in Macedonia. A detailed descriptive profiling of respondents can be found in Appendix 8.3.

Interactions with large carnivores

People in Albania seemed to have more interactions with wolves and bears in the wild when compared to Macedonia as higher incidences of observations, shooting of, and damages from

these two large carnivores were reported (Tab. 2.4). The picture was inverted for lynx, with people in Macedonia having reportedly more interactions with the species. Overall, wolves and bears were the species with which people had most interactions, and lynx were the least interacted with. Respondents in Macedonia had more observation experiences of large carnivores in captivity than Albanian respondents. Wolves were reported as the most damage-causing animal in both countries, followed by bears, whereas there were very few reports of lynx causing damage in Macedonia and none in Albania. There seems to be a general lack of knowledge of lynx as a species in Albania. Despite showing a lynx photograph during the interviews, only about one third (33.5%) of respondents in Albania reported knowing the species and were thus able to give answers to the lynx-related items in the questionnaire.

Attitude differences between species and countries

Through the constructed models we explored the effects of single explanatory variables, and their selected interactions, have on the response variables (SC and CP), while controlling for the effect of other variables. The most obvious effect is that of species in SC (i = 1.00; "i" is the importance of predictor variables expressed in terms of proportion of models that use the variable weighted by each model's Akaike's weight). Bears and lynx enjoy a high support for conservation as they rank the highest in the SC score. Wolves, on the other hand, ranked the lowest among the three large carnivores, being the least favoured species for conservation, among members of the rural public in both Albania and Macedonia (Fig. 2.2). However, the SC score of wolves is still positive (above zero), indicating that, on the whole, the rural population in Albania and Macedonia supports their conservation. It can be argued that all

three species enjoy a positive support for conservation in Albania and Macedonia, however, wolves are supported less than bears and lynx.

The support for conservation results are mirrored by the effect of species in conflict perception (i = 1.00). Wolves are considered by far the species that evoke a greater conflict perception among a majority of people, bears rank second and lynx rank third and almost neutral in their CP (Fig. 2.2). Conflict perception of the three large carnivores is clearly differentiated among locals in the study area depending on the species concerned. While the SC model suggests that bears and lynx enjoy a largely similar support for conservation and wolves are the species that stands out with the lowest support, the CP model separates the three species from each other.

Country differences and their effect on SC and CP, were evident in both constructed models. Support for conservation seemed higher in Albania than Macedonia (when controlled for knowledge, education and gender). The Albanian public had more supportive attitudes for the conservation of all three species, and this difference was higher for lynx and lower for bears (Fig. 2.3). In addition, in Albania, SC for lynx was the highest among all three carnivores, whereas in Macedonia, bears ranked first in SC, slightly above lynx. Wolves had the lowest SC in both countries.

Interestingly, support for conservation does not seem to be driven by conflict perception, as this was higher in Albania. In general, the rural Albanian public perceived wolves and bears as species causing more conflict than their counterparts in Macedonia did. The picture was less pronounced for lynx, the CP of which was close to neutral in Albania and slightly negative in Macedonia (meaning that the majority of the public did not perceive the lynx as a conflict species). In both countries wolves were perceived as the species causing most conflict (Fig. 2.3).

Exploring effects of respondents' characteristics on attitudes

Knowledge

The effect of knowledge was prominent in both models (SC: i = 0.94; CP: i = 1.00). People with greater knowledge about large carnivores were more supportive of their conservation and perceived fewer conflicts with them than people who knew less about large carnivores, who were less supportive of their conservation and had a higher conflict perception (Fig. 2.4). However, there were differences between species on the gradient of such an effect of knowledge on both models. Knowledge had the most impact on SC for lynx and the least impact for wolf (Fig. 2.5). In regard to CP, while increases in knowledge had a very strong impact in reducing conflict perception of lynx and bear, it seems to have a very marginal, to almost no, impact in reducing conflict perception of wolves (Fig. 2.5).

Gender

The gender of respondents was an important predictor in terms of attitudes towards large carnivores, for both SC (i = 1.00) and CP (i = 0.91). Women were, in general, less supportive of large carnivore conservation and considered them more a cause of conflict than men. The difference in SC metric was the largest for bears, and the least pronounced for lynx. On the other hand, both men and women perceived wolves to be the species causing most conflict, and came quite close in that attitude. The difference in the CP metric was, again, largest for bears. With regard to lynx, the majority of men do not consider them as conflict species as their CP is below zero (Fig. 2.6).

Education

Our study revealed a strong effect of education on both SC (i = 0.71) and CP (i = 1.00) models. It seems that higher education levels are associated with an increase in SC. Moreover, higher education levels lead to lower CP. The effect of education was much stronger for CP than for SC (Fig. 2.7).

Whilst for the CP model the education variable does not seem to interact with any other variable for improving the model, for SC it interacts with gender and 'interest in hunting'. There seems to be a difference in how men and women, in terms of how their levels of education, affect support for large carnivore conservation. Education has a much greater effect on women than it does on men. Increased education in men doesn't seem to have a significant effect on SC, whereas the effect is much stronger for women, for whom, increase in education leads to higher support for conservation. Exploring these effects on a species by species approach, we noticed that the difference in the SC metric between men and women decreased significantly with an increase in education of women. In the case of support for lynx conservation, women with higher education are even more supportive then men with the same level of education, and they come quite close to men in the wolves' case (Fig. 2.8).

Since our population sample was highly biased towards men (particularly in Macedonia), careful considerations are needed when interpreting the interplays between gender and education. In addition, exploring education levels between genders and countries showed that in general the Macedonian women sub-sample had a higher level of education than the Albanian one. Most of the women who agreed to partake in the questionnaire survey in Macedonia had tertiary (university) education, considerably higher than the median education of women in Albania (primary education). The Macedonian sub-sample seems to be highly

biased towards more educated women (for results on descriptive statistics of our sampled population refer to Appendix 8.3).

Livestock ownership and damages from large carnivores

Research on public attitudes towards large predators has largely indicated that owning livestock is associated with more negative attitudes towards large carnivores due to real and potential risks the latter pose for livestock husbandry. While 'owning livestock' did not come up as an important predictor in the SC model (importance = 0.29), it seems to have an effect in the CP model, when it interacts with the 'species' variable (Fig. 2.9). Interestingly, while people who owned livestock perceived wolves and lynx as slightly more conflictful species than people who did not own livestock, the effect for bears was the opposite i.e. owners of livestock had lower perception of conflict than people who did not own livestock.

Experiencing damages from large carnivores came up as an important predictor in both models (SC: i = 0.99; CP: i = 1.00). As expected, people who had experienced damages from large carnivores were less supportive of their conservation and had higher conflict perceptions than people who had not experienced damages (Fig. 2.10)

Interest in hunting

The modelling results indicate that 'interest in hunting' has an effect on both SC (i = 1.00) and CP (i = 0.59) models. Interestingly, the parameter "has interest in hunting" seems to be a much stronger predictor of an effect of hunting than the yes/no parameter of whether a person actually practices hunting, which only came up in the SC model (i = 0.64).

It seems that a higher interest in hunting is associated with higher support for conservation of large carnivores (Fig. 2.11). For CP, the 'interest in hunting' variable interacts with the 'country' variable. It seems that an increase of interest in hunting has quite opposite effects on CP with regard to the country concerned. While in Macedonia an increase in interest of hunting is associated with increased conflict perception, in Albania it led to a decrease in conflict perception (Fig. 2.11). These clear discrepancies between the two countries might be manifestations of differences in the hunting systems and historical developments of hunting in the two countries as discussed further below in this paper.

Interest in hiking

A person's 'interest in hiking' was a very important predictor for both SC (i = 0.91) and CP (i = 0.98) models. There is a slight increase in SC with increase of interest in hiking. However, there is also a considerable increase in CP with increase in interest in hiking (Fig. 2.12) and this seemingly unusual outcome will be discussed further below in the paper.

2.4. Discussion

The large carnivore 'guild' and implications for conservation

The present study demonstrates that there are substantial differences in attitudes towards the different species of large carnivores among the rural public in Albania and Macedonia. Support for conservation of wolves was considerably lower than that for bears and lynx. The latter two had similar conservation support across the entire study area, however lynx were the most favoured species in Albania, whereas in Macedonia bears were the most favoured. Conflict perception of the three species was different among locals in the study area, with wolves being considered the most conflict-causing species and lynx the least conflict-causing ones. Support for conservation of the three species was higher in Albania, however this seems independent of conflict perception, which was higher in Albania as well. These clear differences in attitudes have implications for the conservation and management of these species in the region. Programmes and strategies aiming at the conservation of large carnivores in the region need to be developed on a species by species and country by country approach, by considering and incorporating in their planning and implementation process the different species-specific and country-specific support for conservation and conflict perception of the three species.

This research represents the first quantitative study on public attitudes towards wildlife conducted so far in Albania and Macedonia on a representative sample of the population, as well as the first to look at attitude differences between countries by using the same standardised research framework. In addition, it is one of few studies in Europe that simultaneously looks at public attitudes towards several large carnivores. Human dimensions research tends to be focused on single species, with wolves often getting the greatest share of attention (Bath 2000,

2009; Ericsson & Heberlein 2003, Majić & Bath 2010, Nilsen et al. 2007, Williams et al. 2002). There have been few studies that attempt to look at public attitudes towards several large carnivore species at a time (Tab. 2.5), however, the majority of them remain either descriptive in nature or just focus on the factors that influence individual variability in attitudes. In this regard, the present study is one of the first to make a comparative analysis of the attitudes of the same sample of the public towards different carnivore species.

Wildlife management in Albania and Macedonia, much as in other countries of Eastern Europe (Bath et al. 2008) is mainly based on the input of 'experts'. Management decisions are often taken without any form of public consultation, and quite often, without any strong scientific arguments or justifications. With the increasing integration of Albania and Macedonia into European political and economic structures, fostered by their strong commitment in joining the European Union in the near future, much of these countries' policies and legal frameworks tend to reproduce or align with European directives and standards, often without taking into account local particularities. Wildlife management makes no exception in this practice. There is a further problem in that there has been very little research on wildlife and wildlife management related issues in Albania and Macedonia, thus the knowledge platform that experts base their advice on is weak. These gaps in knowledge, combined with generally weak institutions and widespread corruption (Transparency International 2016) on one hand and the rapid reforms for European integration on the other, might result in unfortunate policymaking and management decisions, which can have negative consequences for both wildlife and local communities. Similar scenarios have occurred in neighbouring countries. Bath and Majic (2001) argue that when wolves were upgraded from being a 'game species' to one with full protection status in Croatia in 1995, it was mainly done to show the country's good will for

policy alignment with wider European frameworks, where protection of wolves is promoted and sanctioned. This instantaneous shift did not take into consideration the opinion and traditions of the local population and happened without any form of public involvement and consultation. As hunting was seen as a tool for controlling the wolf population in Croatia and consequently as a conflict mitigation tool, the decision to protect wolves, instead of actually benefiting their population, completely backfired and affected the wolf population negatively. The hasty decision raised great discontent among local inhabitants who were directly affected by the presence of wolves and as a consequence, a sharp increase in illegal killings of wolves was noted immediately after the unpopular decision. In the first three years of full protection, wolf mortality rose 5 to 11 times more than in the previous period when wolves were subject of controlled hunting (Bath and Majic, 2001). The Croatian experience with wolves illustrates the need for research on public attitudes towards wildlife prior to the implementation of management or conservation decisions that involve species with a high-conflict profile, such as large carnivores. Parallels can be drawn for large carnivore management in Albania and Macedonia, as both countries have been going through broadly similar socio-political and economic transitions in the past 25 years (Belloni 2009, Elbasani 2013, Qerimi 2003).

The natural, social and political conditions existing in present-day Europe greatly favour the conservation of large carnivores. The two most important international legal regimes that warrant large carnivore conservation are the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (1979) and the EU Habitats Directive (1992). Wolves and brown bears are listed under Appendix II (strictly protected fauna species) in the Bern Convention, whereas lynx are under Appendix III (protected fauna species). In the Habitats Directive, all three large carnivores are listed in Annex IV (strictly protected species) and Annex II (list of

species for which protected areas must be designated as part of the Natura 2000 network), however wolf and bear are considered as priority species in the latter Annex, whereas lynx is not (Trouwborst 2010). Similarities in large carnivore protection status in Europe are mirrored in conservation initiatives across the continent. Large carnivores are frequently treated as a 'guild' in such initiatives – further based on their similar ecological needs and the similar potential to cause conflict with humans. In broader terms this approach fits within the shifting trend in conservation biology from single-species conservation to a more holistic, 'ecosystem approaches'.

Human dimensions' research on large carnivores has often produced results that call into question the wisdom of this guild approach in conservation and management, primarily because different species of carnivores generate different feelings among members of the public. Kleiven et al. (2004) and Roskaft et al. (2007) conclude that public attitudes of the Norwegian population are quite species-dependant. Norwegians seems to be much more negative towards the larger carnivores, bears and wolves, and more accepting of the smaller ones, lynx and wolverines. More positive attitudes towards lynx are prevalent, even though lynx are documented to cause significantly more damage than wolves and bears in Norway – this is also explained by their higher abundance and larger distribution (Kleiven et al. 2004; Roskaft et al. 2003, 2007). In the Albanian and Macedonian contexts, wolves stand out by having lower support for conservation and higher conflict perception than bears and lynx. The more negative status that wolves have in people's perceptions is probably a reflection of the wolves' greater involvement in conflicts with people (mainly livestock depredation) (Keçi et al. 2008). Lescureux and Linnell (2010) argue that people's attitudes towards carnivore species are based on their ecological characteristics, the reciprocal interactions between the two, and

the infringement that carnivores cause to what is considered 'human space'. As such, wolves are considered as a large 'homogenous' population that is often hard to control on a local level (Lescureux & Linnell 2013), as opposed to bears that are often viewed as individuals and where people feel that they can control the few that adopt undesired behaviours (Lescureux et al. 2011b). Lynx on the other hand are more ambiguous, and even though most studies reveal that they are generally favoured by the local population, they often receive a negative share of opinions due to their cryptic nature, which occasionally gives rise to inaccurate myths of behaviour that make them feared by the local population (Lescureux et al. 2011a).

Cross-country differences between Albania and Macedonia validate a further point for the need of local considerations in the conservation and management of large carnivores. The Albanian rural population seems to be simultaneously more supportive of the conservation of large carnivores and perceiving them as more conflictual species than the Macedonian rural population. While at first sight such a situation might appear contradictory, it has explanatory grounds in considering existing differences in rural livelihoods between the two countries and subsequent interrelationships with large carnivores. In Albania rural communities have largely preserved traditional lifestyles centred on family-based subsistence farming and livestock husbandry (Doempke S. 2010). Almost every village family has some livestock under their ownership, be those either a few cattle or small flocks of sheep and goats for fulfilling the family's dairy needs (Keçi et al. 2008, Kume et al. 2004). Livestock are always looked after and guarded by at least one member of the family when grazing in forests and meadows. In Macedonia the picture seems to be inverted as this subsistence model of livestock husbandry seems to have largely faded. Livestock ownership is concentrated in the hands of fewer individuals, who specialise in such an activity and make a profit from it by owning larger flocks

of livestock (Keçi et al. 2008). The majority of the Macedonian rural population does not own or care for livestock and this could potentially explain the overall perception of large carnivores as less of a conflict species than in Albania. Similarly, these differences in rural livelihoods between Albania and Macedonia can potentially justify the higher support for conservation in the former. The prevalent subsistence farming and stockbreeding observed in Albania ensures a more frequent and close relationship with large carnivores than in Macedonia. Several studies suggest that farmers and livestock owners in societies with more traditional rural livelihoods and subsistence economies tend to show greater tolerance towards large carnivores and have a more positive image of them, than their counterparts in countries with more developed economies and intensive production (Athreya et al. 2013, Boitani 1995, Dorresteijn et al. 2014, Kellert et al. 1996). These country-specific differences were mirrored also in the sheer number of interactions reported with the large carnivores in the wild. The Albanian rural population has a higher level of interactions with wolves and bears in nature compared with the Macedonian one (Tab. 2.4). The majority of respondents in Albania confirmed having seen bears and wolves in the wild at least once in their lifetime. Higher interactions with large carnivores in nature in Albania are an indicator of rural livelihood differences between Albania and Macedonia and could explain the higher support for conservation shown in Albania.

Lynx, on the other hand, stand out from wolves and bears in that they were similarly rarely seen or interacted with in the wild in both countries. The fewer interactions with lynx in general seem to be consistent with the fact that they are much rarer than wolves and bears in the region (Breitenmoser-Würsten & Breitenmoser 2001, Kaczensky et al. 2013, Melovski et al. 2015) and their ecological attributes make them much less visible to humans (Breitenmoser & Breitenmoser-Würsten 2008). Our survey indicated that lynx were largely unknown animals

among the rural public in Albania. About two thirds of respondents in Albania did not even know of the existence of such a species at the time of the survey. On the other hand, lynx was largely known among the rural Macedonian public. This clear difference in knowledge between the two countries is potentially attributable to the prominent symbolic status that lynx hold in Macedonia and their representation in daily life and culture. The Balkan lynx being featured on the 5 Denar (Macedonian currency) coin and used as a symbol on the Macedonian football team jersey (LCIE 2013b), are prime examples of this symbolic status.

Factors influencing attitudes towards large carnivores

In regard to effects of different factors on attitudes, this study largely confirmed what other human dimension research in Europe had generally revealed (Bath et al. 2008, Bjerke et al. 2002, Bjerke & Kaltenborn 1999, Ericsson & Heberlein 2003, Kaczensky et al. 2004, Kleiven et al. 2004, Majić & Bath 2010, Majić et al. 2011, Roskaft et al. 2003). Gender, education, knowledge and damages to livestock were all strong predictors of attitudes towards all three species. Men were more supportive of large carnivore conservation and perceived the animals as causing less conflict than did women. People with higher education and with higher level of knowledge about large carnivores were more supportive of their conservation and had lower conflict perceptions. People who had suffered direct damages from large carnivores were less supportive of their conservation and had higher conflict perceptions.

Interestingly, the 'age' variable did not seem to be a strong predictor of attitudes in our models, contrary to what most other research in Europe has revealed. A multitude of human dimension studies across Europe have shown that older generations tend to have more negative views towards large predators and are usually less supportive of their conservation than younger

people (Andersone & Ozolinš 2002, Bath et al. 2008, Bjerke et al. 2002, Ericsson & Heberlein 2003, Kaczensky et al. 2004, Kleiven et al. 2004, Majić & Bath 2010, Majić et al. 2011, Roskaft et al. 2007, Wechselberger et al. 2005) however this did not seem to be the case for Albania and Macedonia. Examining reasons for this lack of effect of age on attitudes towards large carnivores in the study area warrants further research and is beyond the scope of this paper, however, a potential explanation could lie in the familial and societal structure of rural mountainous villages of Albania and Macedonia, characterised by a strong age-based patriarchal system of governance where the elderly men within families and villages have a role of leadership and exert great influence on the younger members of the community (Danaj 2014, Kaser 1996). Moreover, the persistence of traditional customary laws and practices, particularly in highland Albania (de Waal 2005), ensures the continuity of such systems over time and limits generational changes in attitudes.

Interest in hunting seemed to have an effect on the support for conservation of large carnivores and was a much stronger predictor of attitudes than the fact of whether a person actually hunted or not. This result might have important implications for using hunting as a management approach in the conservation of large carnivores – and in particular about wolves, due to their lower public support when compared to bears and lynx. Various authors have suggested that carefully regulated hunting, conducted and managed by local hunters, is among the most accepted methods for the management of carnivores and can contribute to the reduction of conflicts with locals, increase public acceptance of large predators and even potentially generate income for the local people (Bruskotter et al. 2007, Ericsson et al. 2004, Kaltenborn & Brainerd 2016, Majić et al. 2011, Treves 2009). However, careful country-specific considerations should be made when advocating and using hunting as a conflict-mitigation

tool, as the effect of hunting interest was opposite in the two countries. While in Albania an increase of interest in hunting was associated with lower conflict perception of large carnivores, in Macedonia this increase seems to lead to higher conflict perception. Such opposite effects may have explanatory grounds on differences in hunting traditions between the two countries. In Macedonia there is a longer tradition of recreational hunting, which was particularly well organised during the Yugoslav regime and was conducted in designated and managed hunting grounds (Petkovski et al. 2003). The hunters' community in Macedonia has been organised in associations and clubs for decades. By contrast, in Albania, recreational hunting is a relatively new activity, being fully opened to the broader public only after the collapse of the communist regime in the 1990s and lacking proper forms of control and management. Prior to 1990 recreational hunting was restricted to elite members of the totalitarian government and other trusted members of the community. The longer tradition of recreational hunting in Macedonia and existence of hunting grounds, managed by hunting associations, indicate a higher sense of responsibility and ownership towards prey species among hunters and thus large carnivores could be viewed as competitors and a threat to their activity. In Albania, such forms of organisations in hunting are still nascent and not yet consolidated, thus prey species have not yet been 'commodified' as in Macedonia. Hunting interest in Albania seems to be more of an indicator for nature and wildlife appreciation in general, rather than a representation of hunting interests *per se* and perceptions of game ownership among hunters.

Another nature appreciation indicator that merits further discussion is interest in hiking. Our models indicated that increased interest in hiking in Albania and Macedonia is associated with higher support for conservation. This seems consistent with public attitude findings in other

parts of the continent, where studies have shown that people who engage more in outdoor activities tend to have more positive attitudes towards large carnivores that people who do not (Bath 2000, Roskaft et al. 2003, Wechselberger et al. 2005). At the same time, interest in hiking was associated with higher conflict perception on large carnivores. While this result seems contradictory with the previous one, and not in line with similar studies in other parts of Europe, it can be argued that it has to do with the concept and purposes of hiking in these two countries. Hiking for recreational purposes is almost non-existent or, at best, a nascent activity among rural inhabitants of Albania and Macedonia. Outdoor activities in general, and hiking in particular, are practiced almost exclusively by urbanites, tourists and younger generations in these two countries. Among rural inhabitants walking in the forests is not a recreational activity. It has necessary, utilitarian, activity engaged in for collecting plants, forest fruits or mushrooms. Given this utilitarian walking in forests, where the presence of large carnivores could be viewed as a threat and explain higher conflict perceptions among people with higher interest in hiking. A similar pattern was observed by Balčiauskas and Kazlauskas (2012) for attitudes towards bears in Lithuania. While the majority of people who engaged in outdoor activities had more positive attitudes towards bears, the people who had a utilitarian purpose in these outdoor activities (such as berry and mushroom pickers) were more negative towards bears (Balčiauskas & Kazlauskas 2012). A similar utilitarian-logic could be applicable to explain the higher conflict perception among people with higher interest in hiking in Albania and Macedonia.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this study are interesting in two ways. Firstly, they have clear consequences for the future management of large carnivores in Albania and Macedonia. Because of the lower support shown towards wolves, conservation initiatives that place the bear and lynx into the same category as the wolf would not be advised for the region. Over-protection of the wolf could lead to an escalation of conflict, much like experiences in neighbouring Croatia have shown (Bath & Majic 2001). Conflict escalation with wolves, could spill-over to lynx and bears and be detrimental to the more positive image of the latter. Addressing conflicts with these three species also requires a species-specific approach given the differences in conflict perceptions they evoke among the rural public. Secondly, this is one of very few human-dimension studies conducted in south-eastern Europe. Based on this experience it is possible to conclude that the method worked well in the Albanian and Macedonian social context (although access to women was difficult and posed sampling limitations and biases) and produced meaningful results. The general factors explaining attitudes towards large carnivores were broadly similar to studies conducted elsewhere in western, central and northern Europe, indicating the broad generality of these patterns.

2.5. List of tables and figures

Tab. 2.1. Population and legal status of large carnivores in Albania and Macedonia (from Kaczensky et al. 2013)

	Albania		**Macedonia**	
	Population	Status	Population	Status
Species				
Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*)	180-200	Protected	160-200	Protected
Grey wolf (*Canis lupus*)	200-250	Protected	267	Hunted
Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*)	5-10	Protected	23-40	Protected

Tab. 2.2. PCA loadings of each attitudinal question for the two extracted factors. Only values >0.30 are shown.

Question	**Support for Conservation**	**Conflict Perception**
How do you feel about [bears, wolves, lynx]	0.72	-0.30
It is important to save [bears, wolves, lynx] for future generations	0.76	
[Bears, wolves, lynx] attract tourists	0.68	
[Bears, wolves, lynx] cause big damage on livestock	-0.35	0.64
I'm afraid the presence of [bears, wolves, lynx] might cause financial loss		0.69
[Bears, wolves, lynx] that kill livestock should be killed	-0.36	0.57
It is known that [bears, wolves, lynx] kill people		0.57
[Bears, wolves, lynx] reduce prey populations significantly and make hunting impossible		0.65
[Bears, wolves, lynx] should be entirely protected by law	0.69	
I would agree for [bears, wolves, lynx] numbers to increase in [AL, MK]	0.67	-0.31
I think we already have enough of [bears, wolves, lynx] in [AL, MK]	-0.31	0.48
There should be authorised hunting of [bears, wolves, lynx] in [AL, MK]		0.61
% of variance explained by each factor	24	24
Cumulative % of variance explained	24	48

*Tab. 2.3. Support for conservation (SC) and conflict perception (CP) models and the explanatory variables used in them. Explanatory variables with * are a-priori hypothesised interaction variables, which improve the model.*

Response variable	Explanatory variables
Support for conservation (SC)	'species', 'interest in hunting', 'gender', 'had damage', 'knowledge species', 'interest in hiking', 'seen captive', 'country', 'education', 'practice hunting', 'species*gender', 'gender*education', 'hunt*education', 'species*knowledge species', 'species*country'
Conflict perception (CP)	'country', 'species', 'education', 'knowledge species', 'gender', 'had damage', 'interest in hiking', 'seen captive', 'interest in hunting', 'has livestock', 'species*has livestock', 'species*gender', 'species*knowledge species', 'country*hunt', 'country*species'

Tab. 2.4. Summary of respondents' interactions with large carnivores per country.

		Species					
		Brown bear		Wolf		Lynx	
Interaction		AL	MK	AL	MK	AL	MK
Seen in nature	*N*	277	166	318	196	41	44
	%	69.8	45.9	80.1	54.1	10.3	12.2
Seen in captivity	*N*	236	316	228	309	14	237
	%	59.4	87.3	57.4	85.4	3.5	65.5
Had damage caused by	*N*	67	30	166	54	0	4
	%	16.9	8.3	41.8	14.9	0	1.1
Had killed one	*N*	15	4	29	13	0	4
	%	3.8	1.1	7.3	3.6	0	1.1

Tab. 2.5. Attitudes differences of large carnivore species in various European countries (>> great difference, > difference, >= slight difference or equal)

Study	Country	Attitudes comparison (from positive to negative)	Country specific particularities
Andersone & Ozolinš 2004	Latvia	bear >> lynx > wolf	Bears are rare
Kleiven et al. 2004	Norway	lynx > wolverine >> bear > wolf	
(Roskaft et al. 2007)	Norway	lynx > wolverine >> bear > wolf	
Wechselberger et al. 2005	Slovakia	lynx > bear >> wolf	Bears problem over garbage
Wechselberger & Leizinger 2005	Austria	lynx >= bear > wolf	
Hunziker et al. 2001	Switzerland	lynx > wolf > bear	Bears are not present

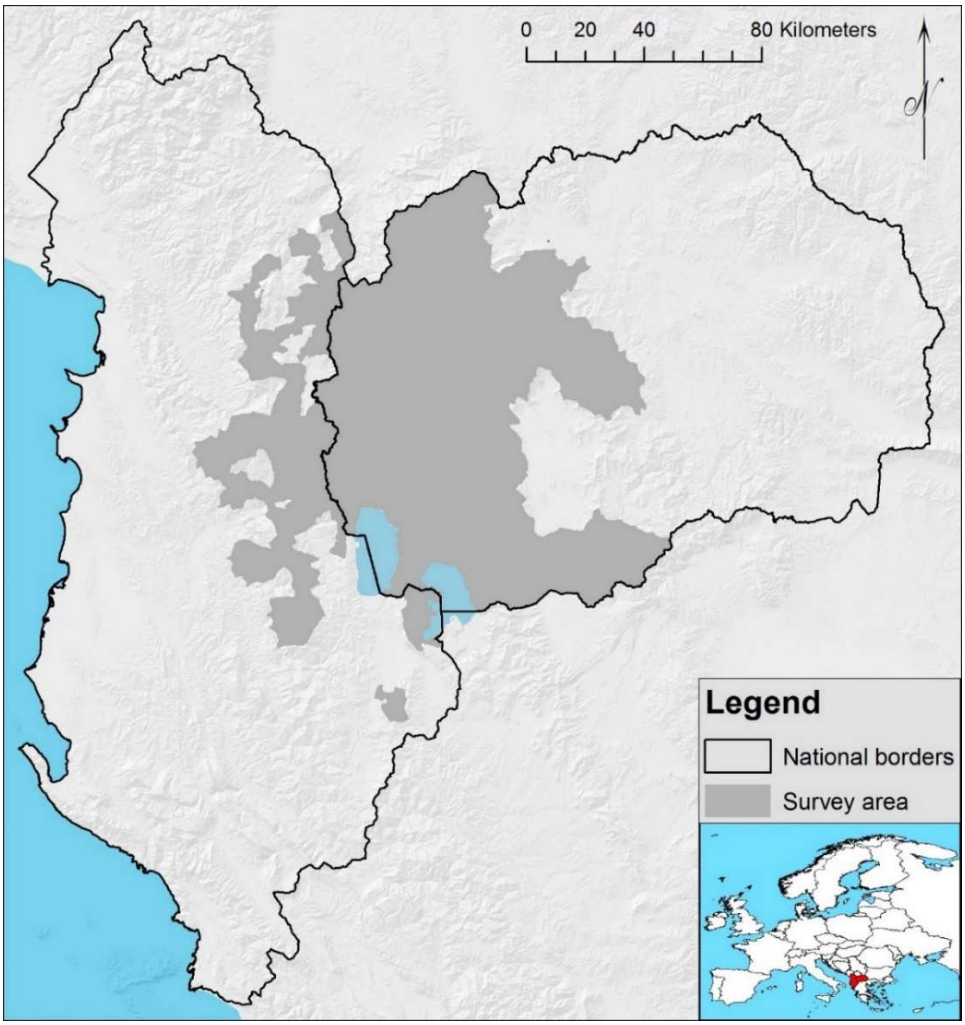

Fig. 2.1. Study areas (highlighted in grey), including 32 municipalities (former 'komuna') in eastern Albania and 29 municipalities (opštini) in western Macedonia. Map prepared by Vasko Avukatov.

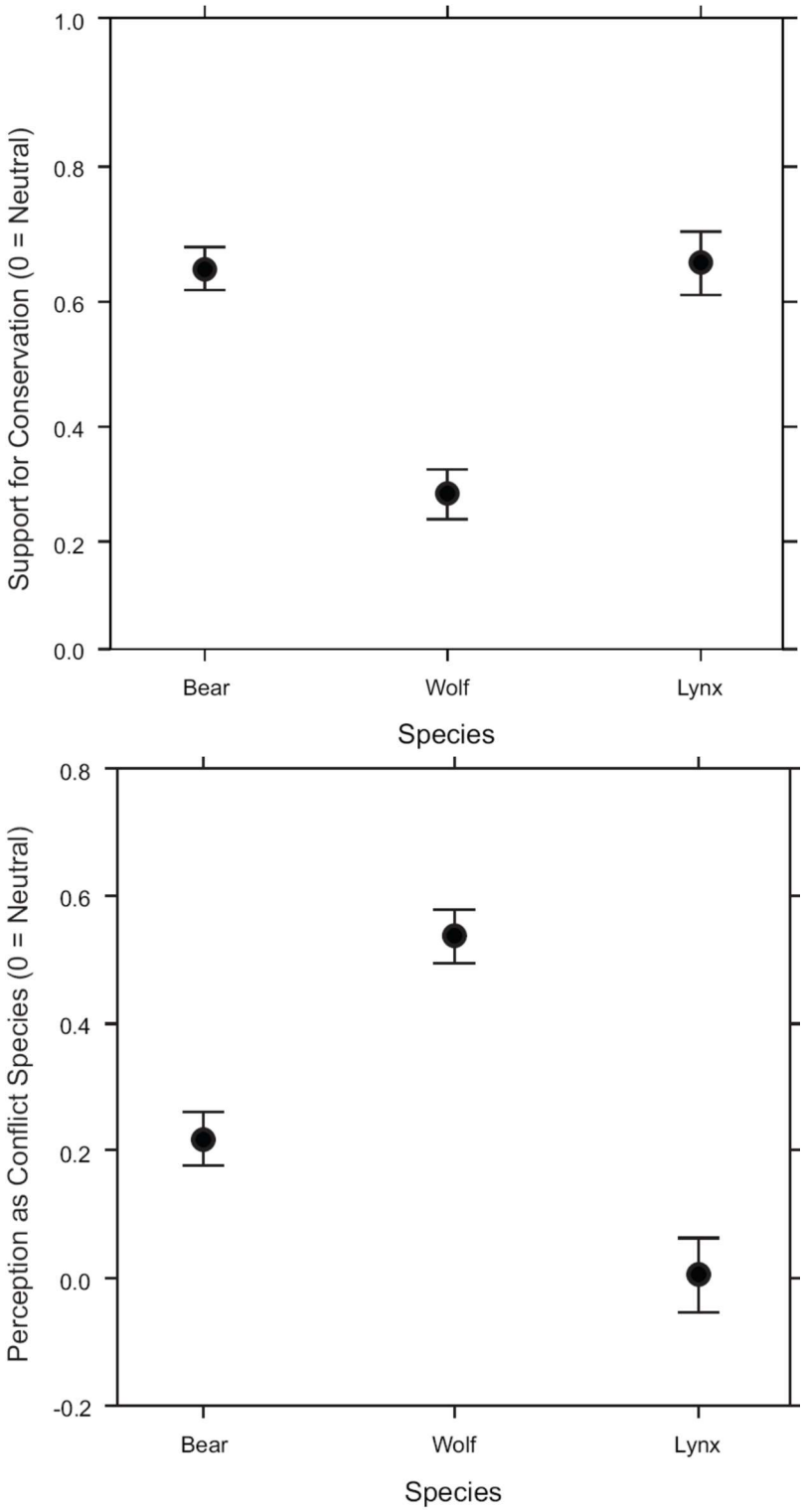

Fig. 2.2. Effect of species in Support for Conservation (above) and Conflict Perception (below). For SC -2 = most negative, 0 = neutral, +2 = most positive and for CP -2 = no conflict, 0 = neutral, +2 = most conflict. Bears and lynx seem to enjoy a high support for conservation, whereas wolves have by far the lowest support (albeit still positive). Wolves are considered the most conflict causing species, followed by bears, while lynx rank almost neutral in people's conflict perception.

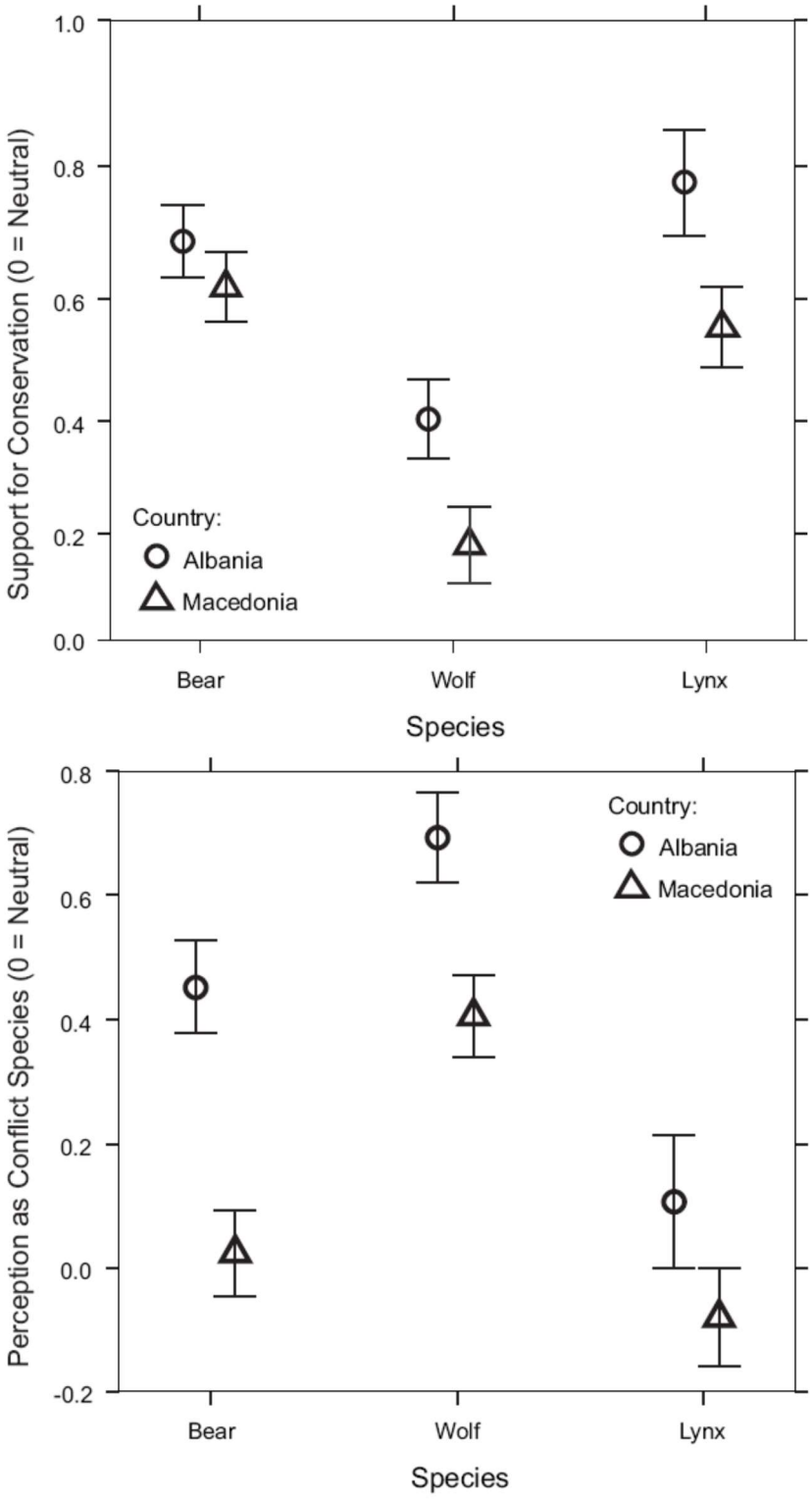

Fig. 2.3. Effect of species by country in SC (above) and CP (below). All three species are supported more in Albania than in Macedonia, with the difference being largest for lynx and smallest for bear. Simultaneously, all three species are perceived more conflict causing in Albania than in Macedonia.

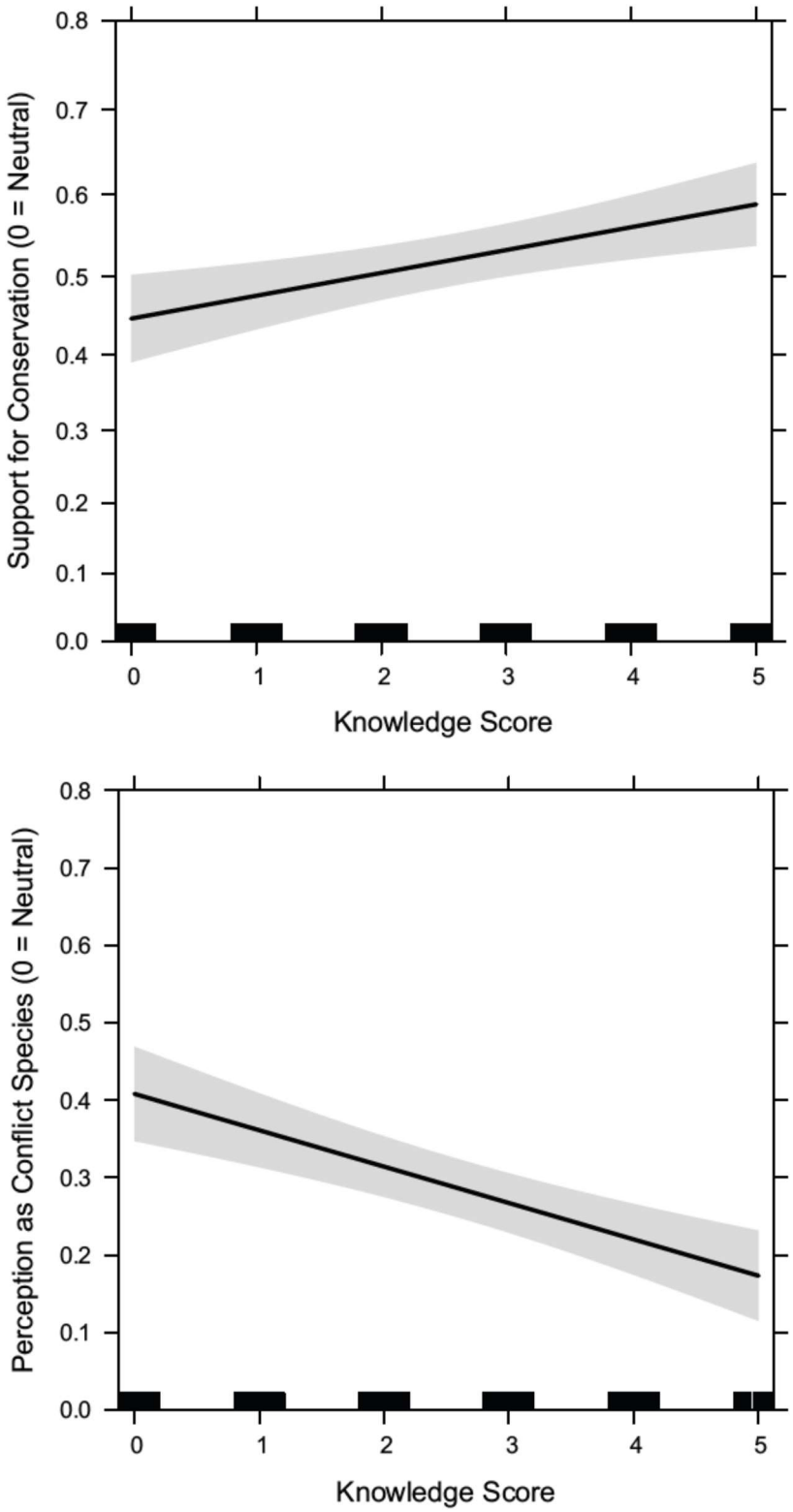

Fig. 2.4. Effect of knowledge on attitudes towards large carnivores. Effect on SC (above) and CP (below). Higher knowledge about large carnivores leads to higher support for conservation and lower conflict perception.

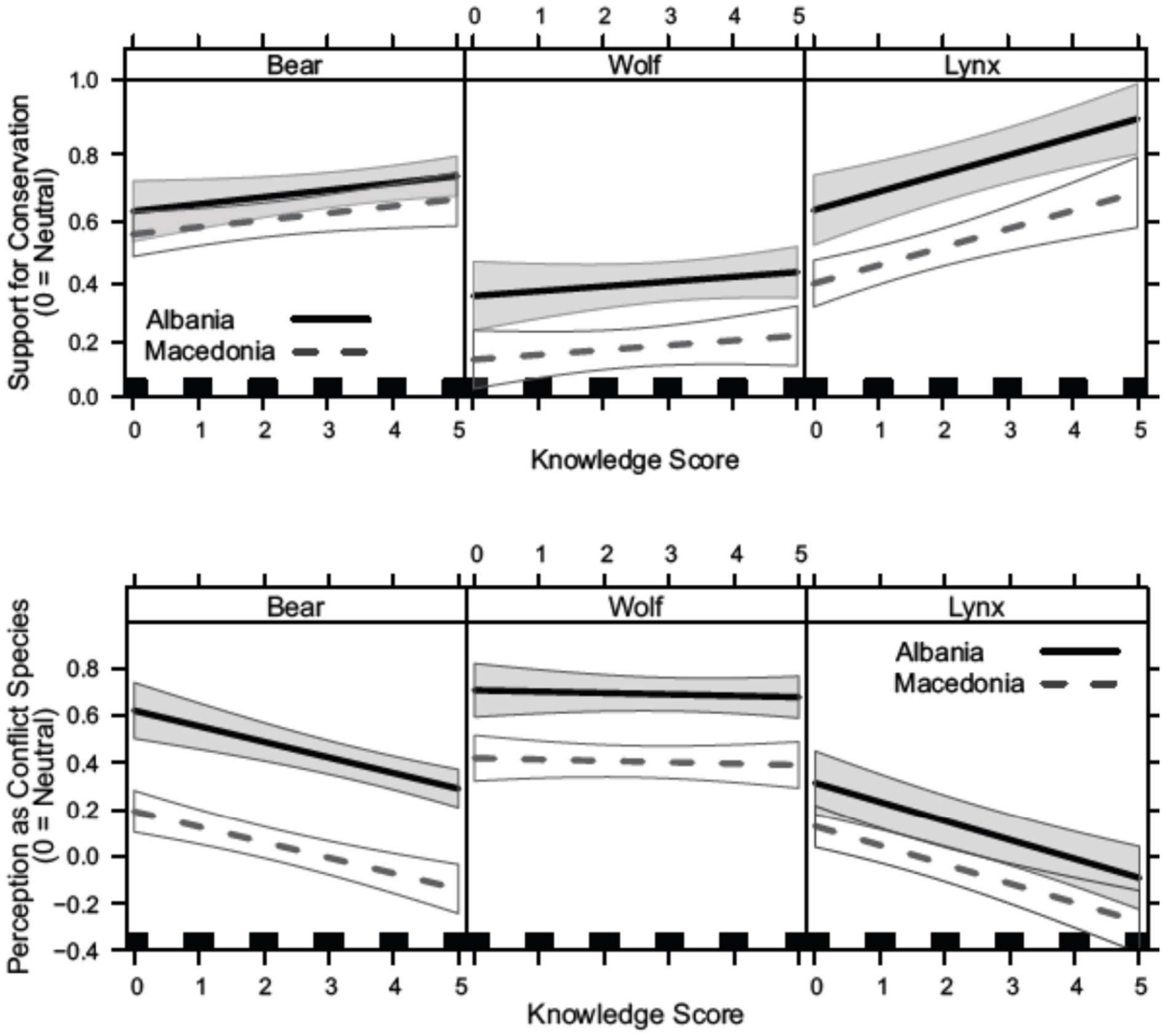

Fig. 2.5. Effect of knowledge on SC (above) and on CP (below) by species and country. The effect in SC is stronger for lynx and least pronounced for wolf, whereas in CP effect of knowledge is almost negligible for wolf and very strong for lynx and bear.

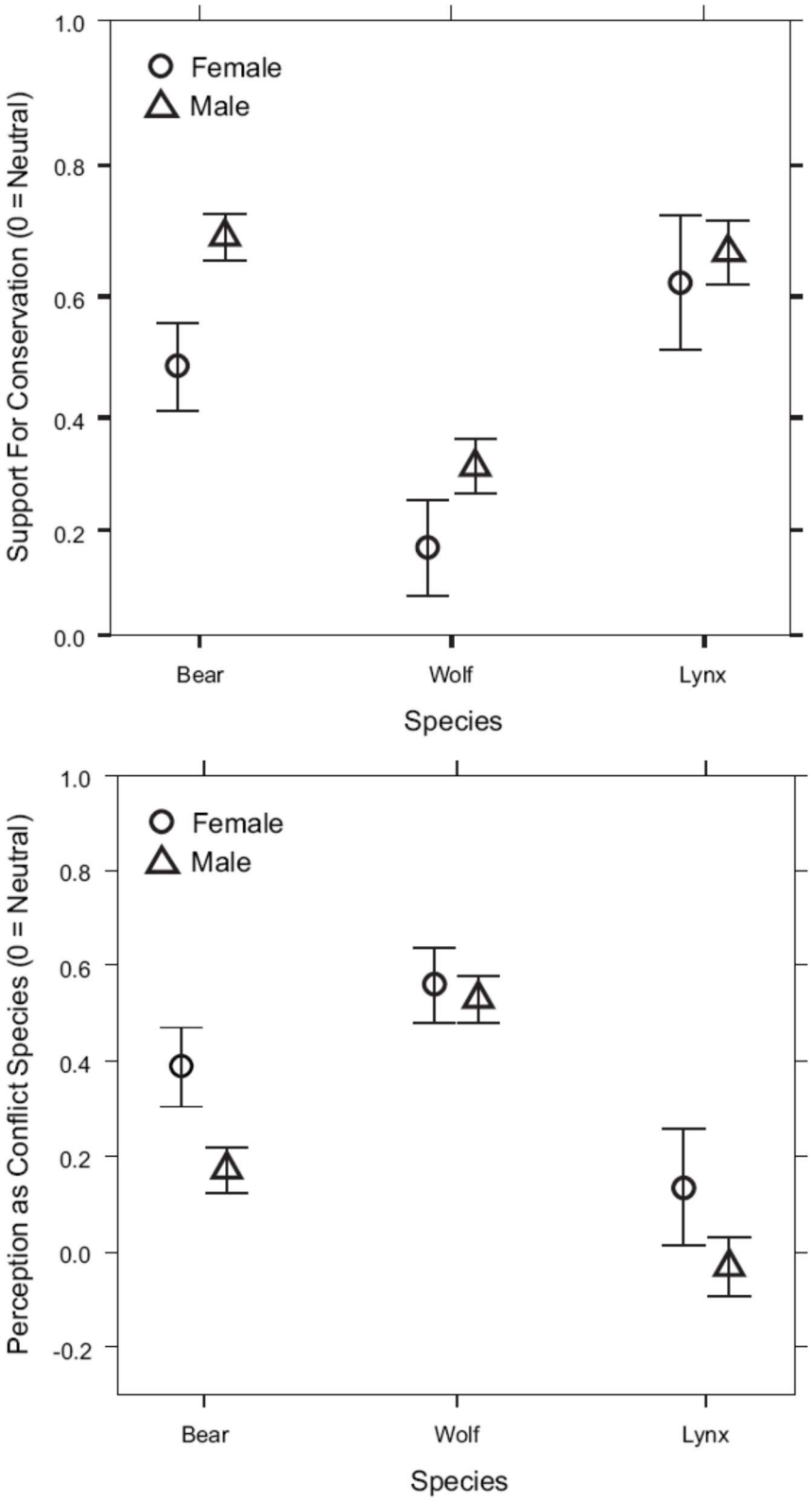

Fig. 2.6. Effect of gender on SC (above) and on CP (below). Men are more supportive of LCs and perceive them less conflict species than women do.

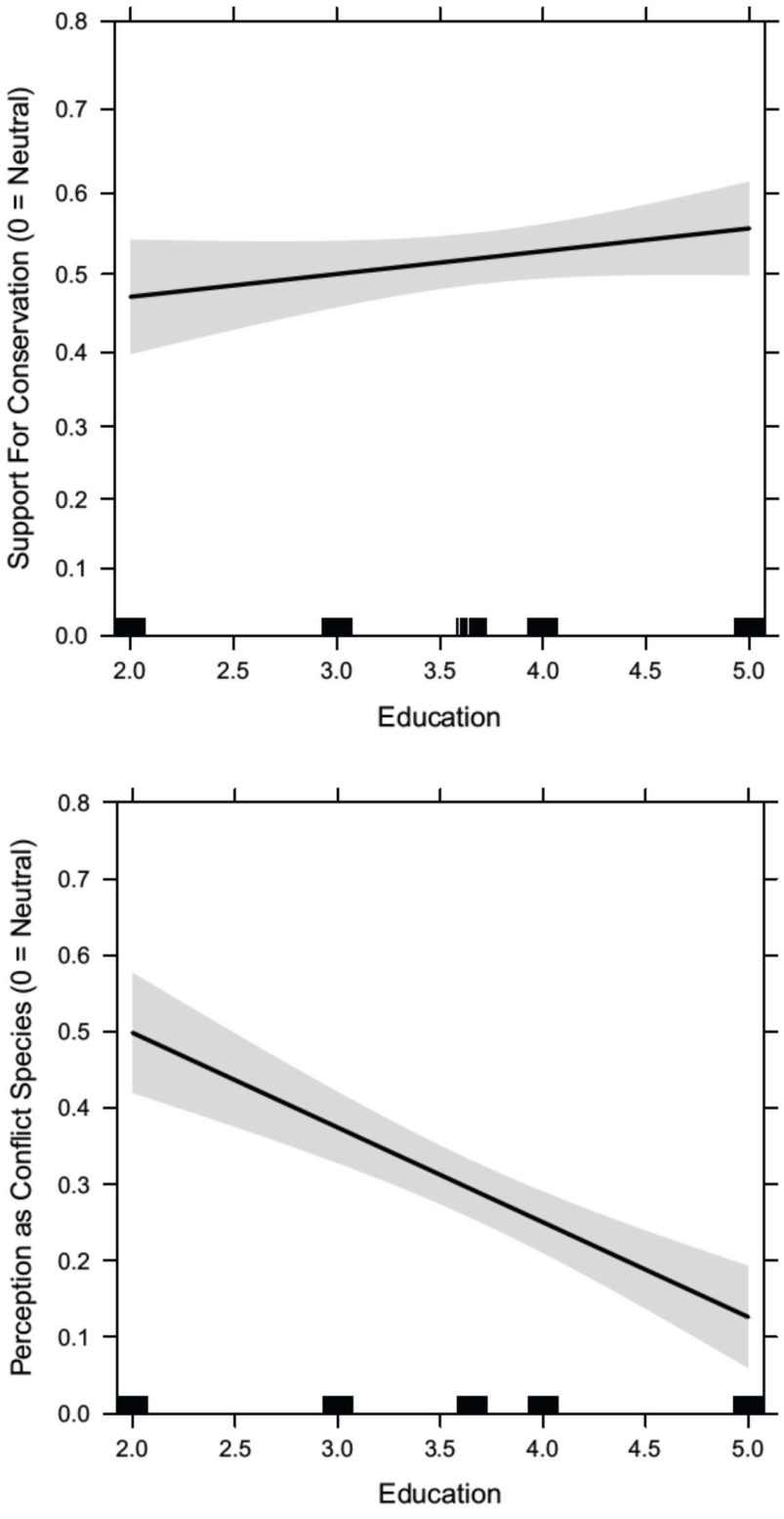

Fig. 2.7. Effect of education on SC (above) and CP (below). Higher education leads to higher support for conservation and lower conflict perception.

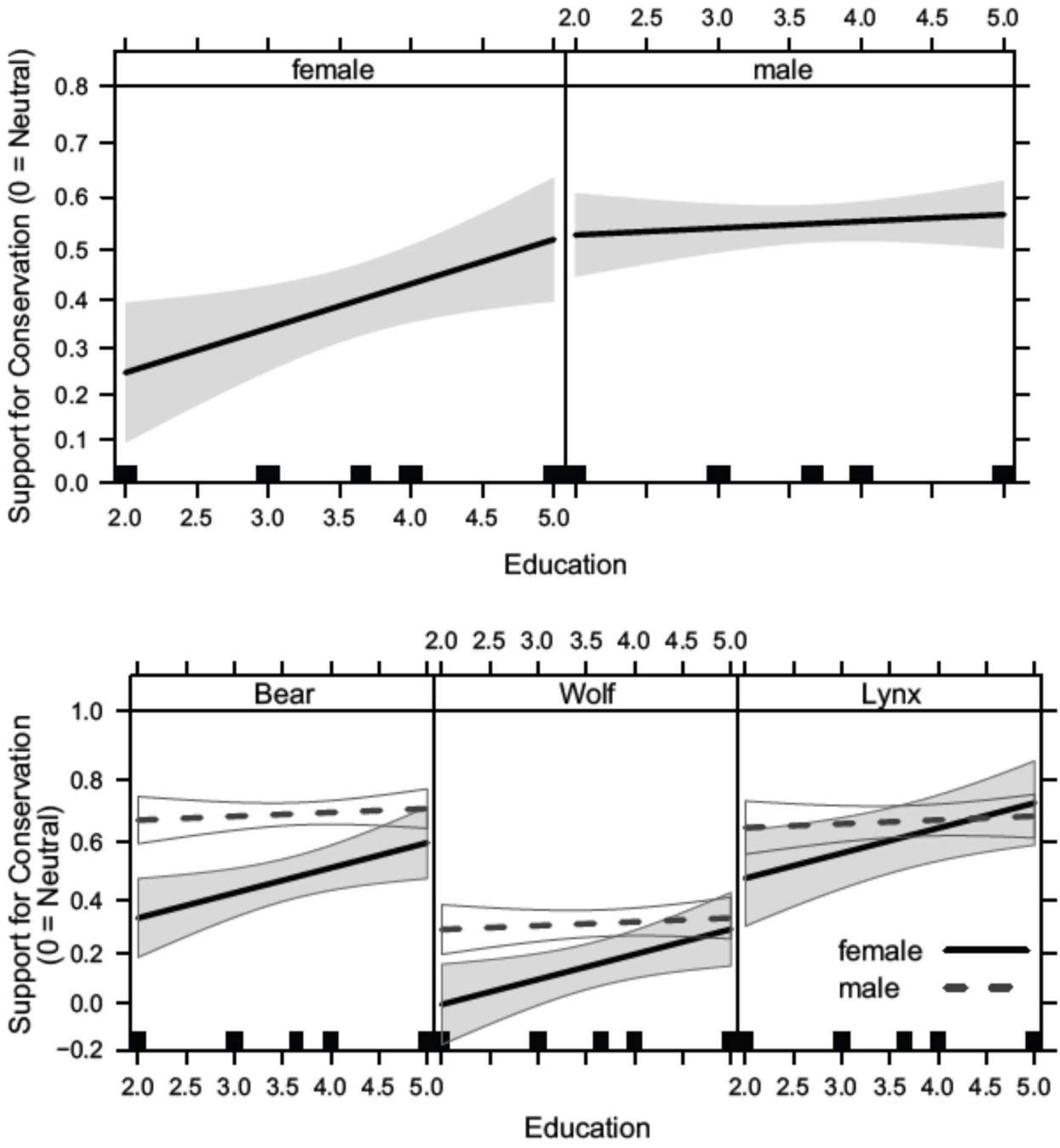

Fig. 2.8. Effect of education by gender (above) and by gender and species (below). The effect in SC is stronger for women; higher education in women leads to higher SC than among men.

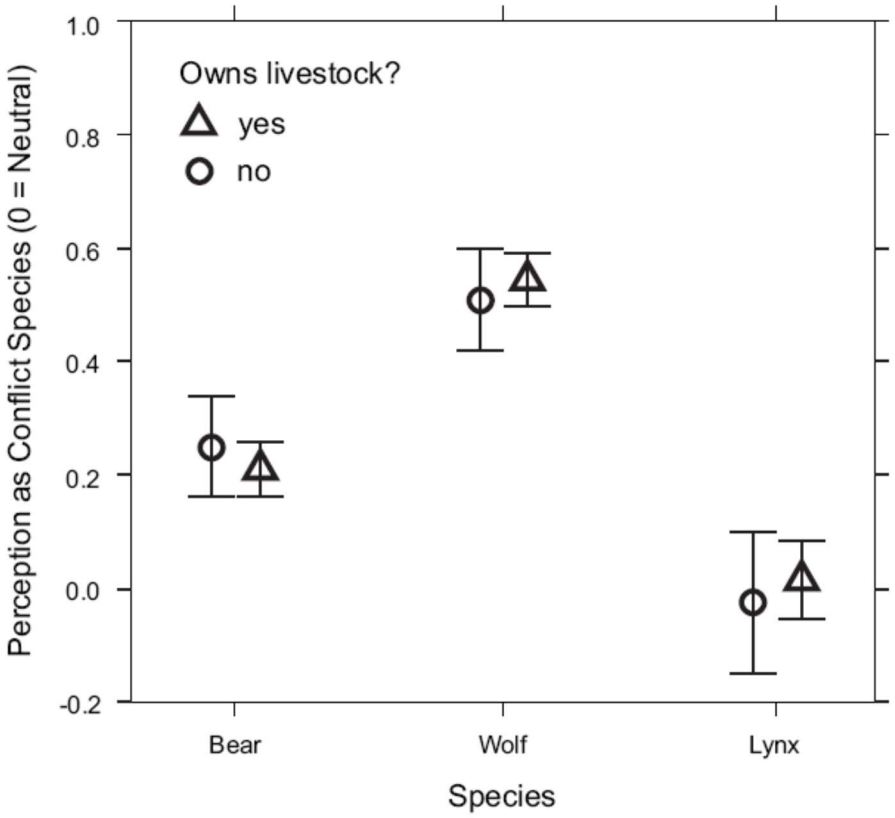

Fig. 2.9. Effect of owning livestock on CP. Owners of livestock have higher CP for lynx and wolf and lower CP for bear than people who do not own livestock.

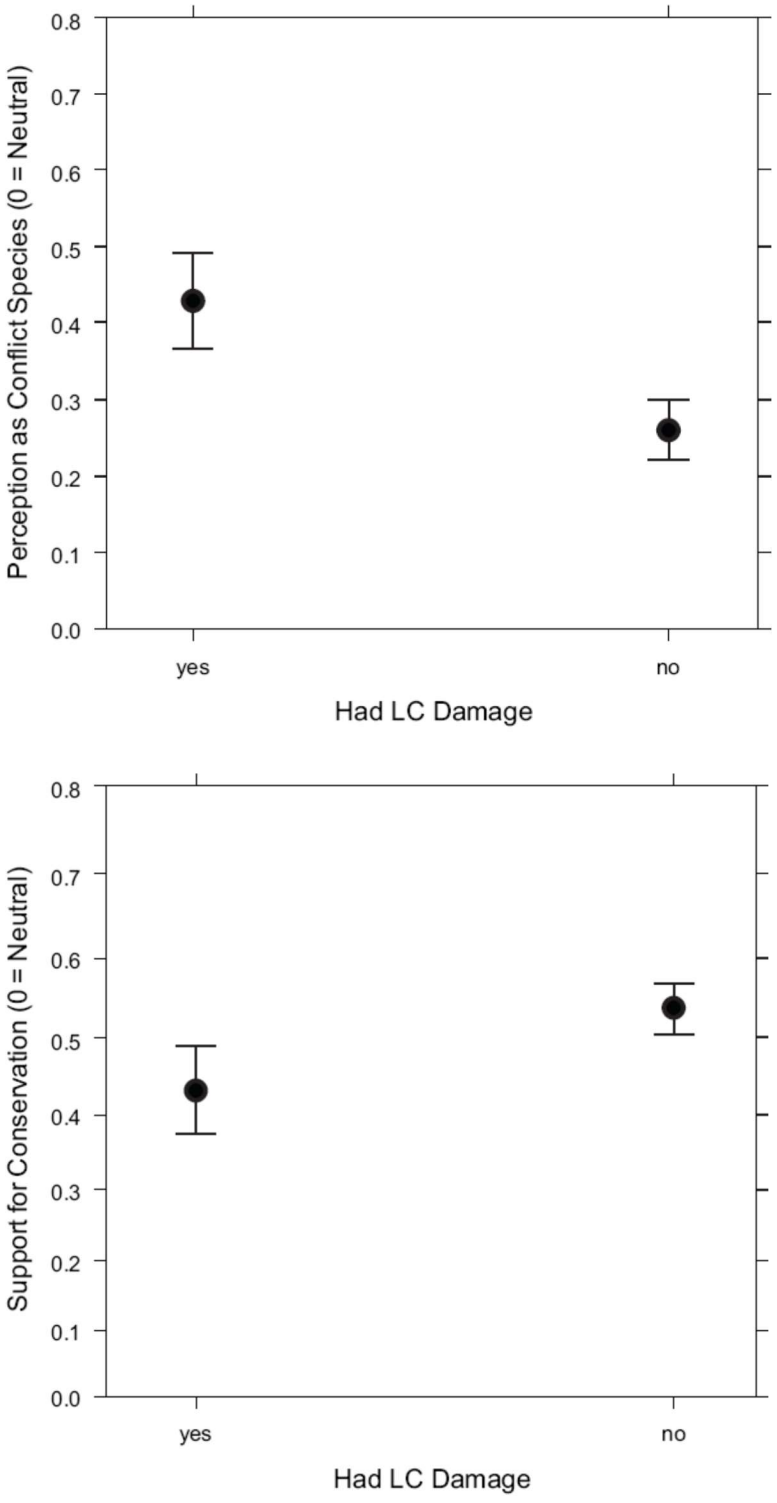

Fig. 2.10. Effect of having experienced damage from large carnivores on SC (above) and CP (below). People who have experienced damage from LCs have lower SC and higher CP than people who have not experienced damage.

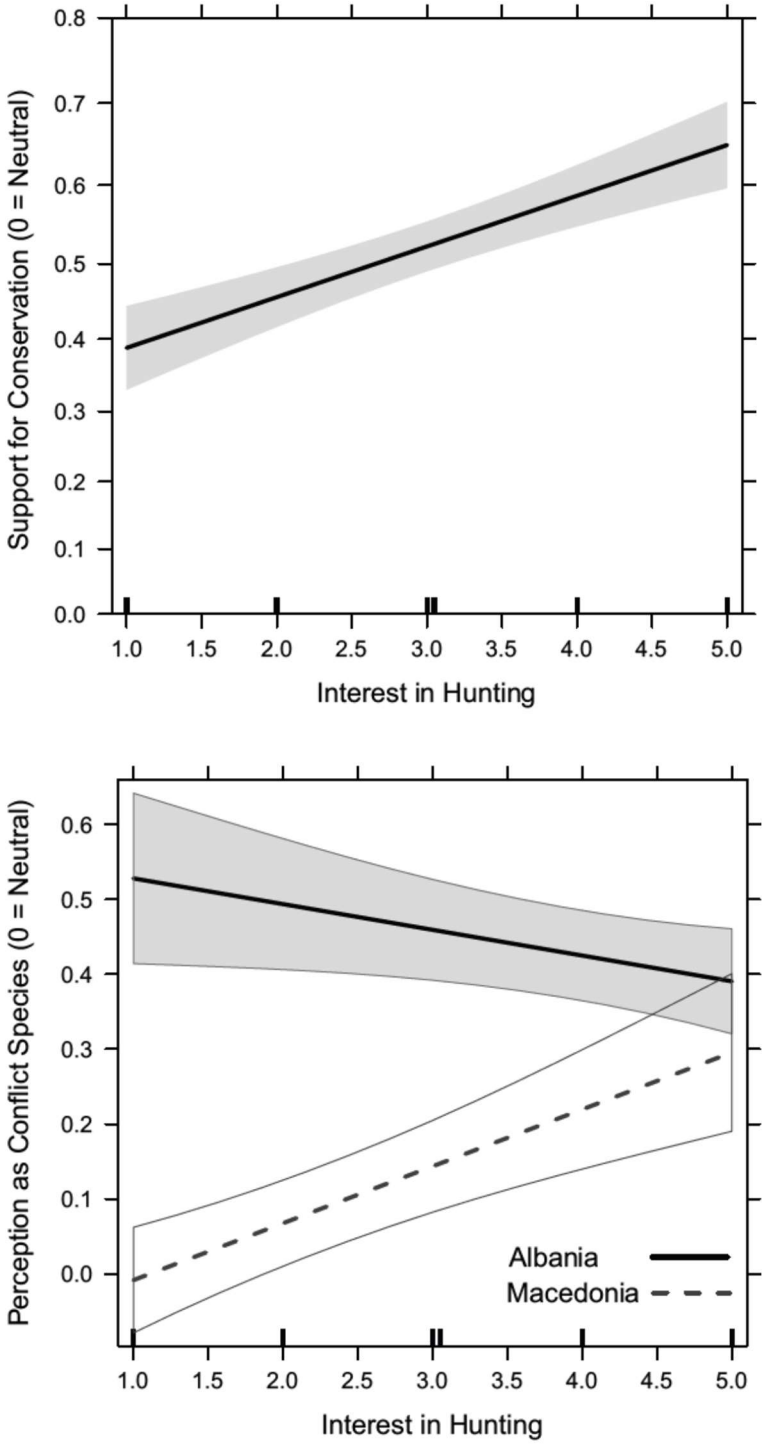

Fig. 2.11. Effect of interest in hunting on SC (above) and effect of interest in hunting by country on CP (below). Higher interest in hunting leads to higher SC, whereas it leads to lower CP in Albania and higher CP in Macedonia.

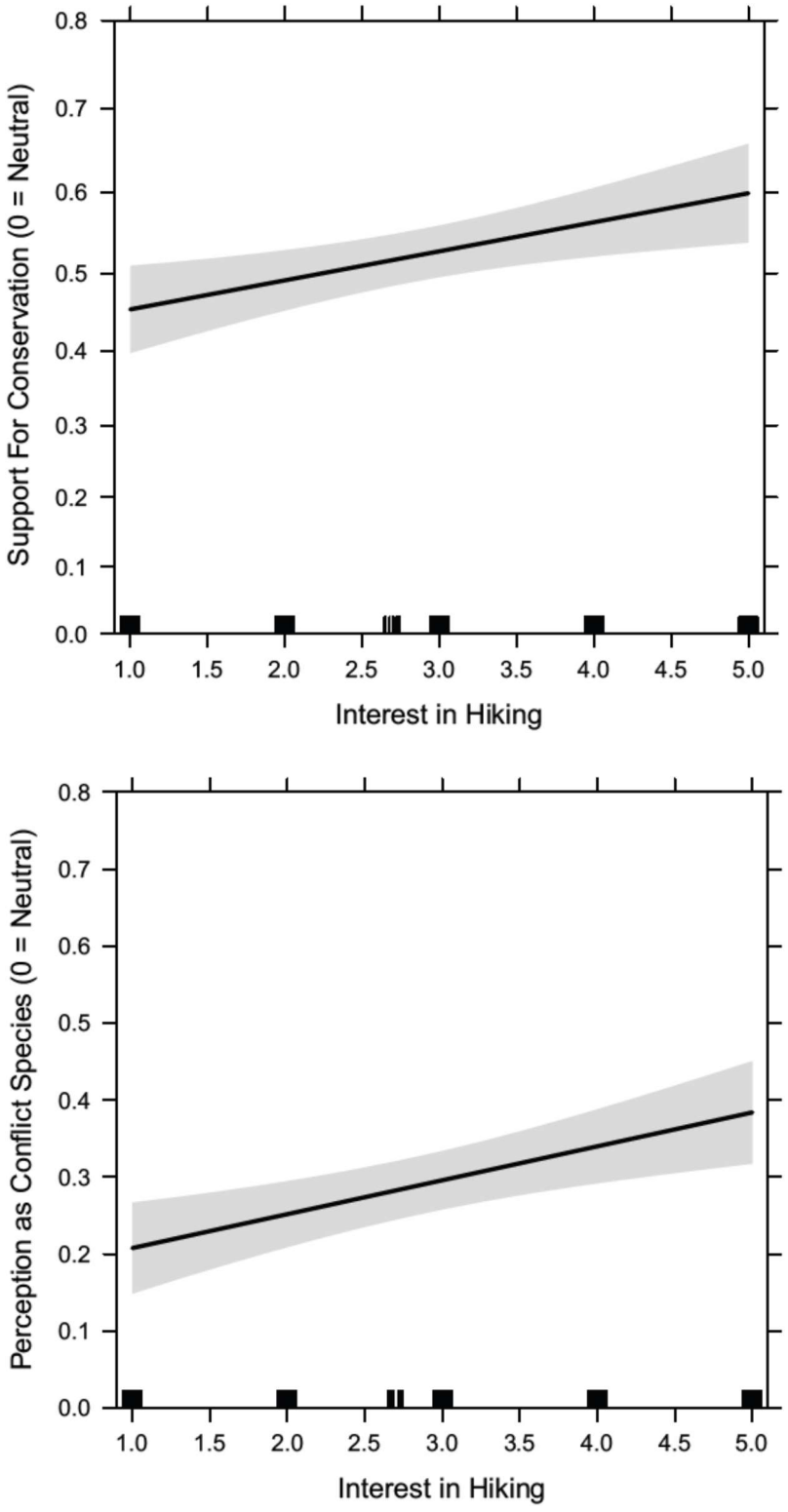

Fig. 2.12. Effect of interest in hiking on SC (above) and on CP (below). Higher interest in hiking leads to higher SC and CP.

3. An ethnographic profile of large carnivores in Albania

In this chapter I turn to the ethnographic approach for exploring how local people in highland Albania, construct and perceive the large predators they share environments with. The ethnographic survey undertaken in two mountainous regions of Albania allows for interpretations of how the shepherds, hunters, farmers, foresters and other locals in these areas perceive, experience and interrelate with bears, wolves and lynx. I will be following a case-by-case approach for all three species to gain insights into the local knowledge of people towards the profile of each large predator. This approach is not only chosen in terms of organising and presenting the material, but also in continuation of the results of Chapter 2. Local people clearly separate among large carnivore species and do not consider them as an ecological guild in the fashion presented by biological and conservation literature. This was further supported by the results of this ethnographic work as throughout the discussions with locals the term 'large carnivore' in its Albanian equivalent was never used by respondents to refer to this group of species. For rural dwellers in mountainous Albania, a lynx is specifically a lynx, a bear is specifically a bear and a wolf is specifically a wolf and while they might have communalities in the ecological thinking of biologists and zoologists, from the perspective of locals they are three very different species which evoke different perceptions and attitudes, and which do not fit within the ecologically-clumped group of 'large carnivores'.

3.1. Lynx: unknown, beautiful and problem-solving

Of the three large carnivores, lynx seem to stand out as the least known species when compared with bears and wolves. This is not only in terms of their ecology and ways of living, of which local people showed extremely limited – and often inaccurate – knowledge, but also that many people did not know that they even existed as a species; lynx were largely unknown among rural dwellers in both Munella and Shebenik (hereinafter abbreviated as 'Mu' and 'Sh', after the names of villages). This result is consistent with previous quantitative studies of local ecological knowledge (Ivanov et al. 2008, Trajçe et al. 2008) and rural attitudes towards large predators (Chapter 2) in which about only one third of the sampled local population in Albania had knowledge of the existence of lynx. Even among respondents who claimed to know of lynx, subsequent discussions mostly revolved whether they were present or absent. Interactions with the animal seem to be very limited, which is likely due to the shy and elusive nature of lynx in the wild. On most occasions, people who confirmed knowing of lynx, admitted to having never seen one themselves, but of knowing about them through other people who have had encounters with them: "*I have heard of lynx from the elderly and from others who have seen them. However, I have never seen one myself in more than 20 years of being up in the mountains*" a shepherd from Letëm village (Sh), stated. Interestingly, lynx were often misidentified with other wild animals, most commonly with wildcats, martens and badgers: "*We know lynx but we call them fishnjak here. […] they are wild cats, they are as big as cats but different because their tail is bushy and long […] and they have a dark coat*" stated a shepherd from Pishkash (Sh), while his description referred to a marten. The word *fishnjak* is a local name used in central Albania for stone martens (*Martes foina*). Similarly, a farmer from Stebleva (Sh) described the lynx as "*that animal with a white stripe on its head*", evidently

mistaking lynx with badgers (*Meles meles*). Another common misidentification of lynx was with polecats (*Mustela putorius*), as several respondents wrongly referred to lynx as "*that one that smells badly*", a prominent feature of Eurasian polecats which use foul-smelling excretions for territory marking; the local name of polecats in Albanian is *qelbësi*, which literally translates as 'the one that stinks'. Given this confusion about lynx, I often had to double check with respondents to see whether they were talking about the correct species. I did so, by often showing photographs of different animals and asking them to point out which animal they thought was the lynx. On multiple occasions the animal which respondents were referring to as lynx, was, in fact, another species from the ones mentioned above and I had to discard further queries about lynx in the rest of the conversation. When faced with images of lynx, many respondents were quite sceptical about the possible presence of an animal with its likes and appearance and expressed disbelief that such an animal would live in forests nearby their villages. On showing a lynx picture to a farmer from Fushë-Studa (Sh) and telling him that these animals have documented presence in the forests above his village, he exclaimed: "*That's impossible! I've never seen or heard of this animal [living around here] my entire life. Such animals live only in Africa! They show them on television.*" At another occasion I was discussing with a shepherd in Kusar (Sh), in a location not more than 500 meters away from where my colleagues and I at PPNEA had photographed the first lynx in Shebenik-Jabllanica National Park in 2012 through the use of camera-traps (Trajçe & Hoxha 2012). I showed the lynx picture (photo in Appendix 8.5) to the shepherd and asked whether he had ever seen such an animal in the mountains. The shepherd, who claimed to have been working in the mountains of Kusar for more than 30 years, responded: "*This one looks like a tiger. Exactly like a tiger! I do not think that this animal lives here. They need larger spaces to live!*" I went on to tell to

him that the photo I was showing was taken by camera-traps set near the water springs on the trail to his *stani*, not more than 500 meters from the location we were discussing. The shepherd expressed disbelief and claimed that even if these animals lived around here, they must be extremely rare for him not to have seen one in the mountains throughout his entire life.

A few respondents would recall stories of unusual animals, usually heard from others and which had happened a long time ago, and associate them to lynx as a possible explanation. A forester from Korça, in southeast Albania, claimed not to know what lynx were, when I initially asked him about it. After describing the animal to him, he vaguely recalled a story from many years ago, told to him by elders of the region, describing a type of 'wild-cat' capable of attacking livestock. He claimed that these were rumours from the region of Vithkuq (a nearby mountainous area) that some 'lions' or 'tigers', escaped from zoos or circuses in nearby Greece, were venturing into the mountains. People were reporting livestock being killed in unusual ways, not in the manner of wolves or bears, to which locals were accustomed. When I showed him a picture of a lynx, the forester seemed to be convinced that these stories had probably been about it, however he estimated that such an animal was no longer present in the region for more than thirty or forty years. Several years ago, I had recorded a similar story featuring 'lions' or 'tigers' escaped from enclosures either in Macedonia or Greece and living in the mountains of Prespa region in southeast Albania, bordering both countries. Locals reported that there was a time when livestock started being killed in an unusual way and not like wolves or bears would normally kill them and which villagers could easily identify. Rumours of 'lions' or 'tigers' being released or escaped from zoos or circuses in neighbouring countries had quickly emerged, and were used as an explanation for the peculiar livestock kills. A villager from Prespa had lost his donkey in such an unusual way. He claimed that he had

never seen a donkey being killed just from an injury on the rump, where apparently the wild animal had attacked and started consuming the donkey. He stated knowing other cases in which donkeys had been even more severely injured in the rump by wolves, but still made it and survived, whereas his donkey had died from a small wound on the rump and no other signs of aggression were visible on the donkey's body. Interestingly, studies on the ecology of lynx (Breitenmoser & Haller 1993, Krofel et al. 2009) show that their method of killing is to go for the prey's throat and suffocate it, while perforations from their teeth are hardly visible on the prey's skin due to lynx's teeth sharpness. Lynx would then proceed to consume the animal starting from the rump and working their way up the body, by consuming flesh and muscles and leaving most internal organs and the prey's skin intact. A fully grown roe deer is usually consumed in such a way within a week (Breitenmoser et al. 2012). The description from the villager from Prespa largely fits with a lynx kill situation, where marks on the throat of the donkey were perhaps not visible and the only clear sign of damage the villager could see was the open injury on the rump of the donkey, which is the most likely place a lynx would start consuming its prey.

Among respondents who had knowledge of the lynx's existence, there were few people who had actually seen lynx in nature. Sightings of lynx were usually a 'one-off' experience, and some respondents claimed to not even know, at the time of the observation, what type of animal the one they had seen was. Nonetheless, encounters with lynx, albeit being rare and usually concerning a one-off event, seemed to be well-remembered by people, who often described the experience quite vividly even if it had happened a long time ago. A hunter from Fushe-Studa (Sh) stated that he saw lynx for the first time when he was a 10 years old child and while playing on snow with his friends not very far from the village. At the time he did not know

what the animal was, however it remained engraved in his memory because of the animal's distinctiveness. He came to learn about lynx many years later, when some hunters had killed a lynx and brought the body down to the village, and only then did he realise that the animal he saw as a child was a lynx. Another hunter from Qarrishta (Sh) vividly recalled his first and only encounter with a lynx in the wild, even though it had happened many years ago: "*maybe in the autumn of 2002 or 2003*" according to his statement. He claimed to have seen the lynx while he was out hunting for hares in the rocky slopes above Kosharishta village (Sh) and was impressed by the animal's beauty and agility when moving amidst the rocky terrain. Up to that moment he'd only known lynx from stories told to him by other people and from images on handbooks and leaflets. A shepherd from Kodër-Spaç (Mu) told me that the first time he saw a lynx was a couple of years ago and that initially he had no idea what animal it was. He simply called it a 'wild cat' at the time. He saw it not very far from his house; it was dawn but there was snow everywhere so the animal was clearly visible. The shepherd described it to be "*almost as big as a dog*", with spots on its fur and with a short tail. He came to know that the animal he had seen was called 'lynx' only when he had the chance to meet with my colleagues and I in 2012, and we showed him camera-trap pictures of lynx taken in Munella mountain.

In several cases, respondents confirmed having their first experience with lynx not through observations of live animals in the wild, but by seeing a dead individual instead – either snared, poisoned or shot: "*My father used to set snares for martens, because their coat was valuable […] and in one case a lynx was caught in one snare […] this happened before the 1960s […] in a snare that my father had set not very far from the village […] it was a beautiful thing, very beautiful!*", a beekeeper in Kimza (Mu) recalled. Seeing dead lynx seemed to be a more conventional way of getting to know the animal than observing live individuals in the wild.

All three lynx a forester from Dorëz (Sh) had seen in his life were dead individuals: "*During the communist regime we used to put out poisoned sheep as bait with the intention to poison wolves. In two cases we found dead lynx next to the poisoned sheep […] This happened in Shapka Pass facing Qarrishta […] I have also seen another [dead] one that was captured with a snare near Lugjet e Hysajt some 20 years ago. […] I have never seen a lynx in nature myself. I only know them through the two poisoned individuals at Shapka Pass and the snared one at Lugjet e Hysajt."* Similarly, an experienced forester from Librazhd, who had worked in the mountains of Shebenik for more than 30 years, stated: "*I have never seen a lynx in the wild. I have only seen a stuffed (taxidermied) lynx … and a lynx that had been killed."*

This lack of knowledge of and interactions with the species was thought to bring on negative consequences for lynx, especially if encounters in the wild would happen with unknowledgeable hunters. A forester from Puka (Mu) warned that hunters who had never seen a lynx in nature and were unaware of the existence of the species could be a threat to them, as they might kill the big cat just out of curiosity, if a first encounter would happen in the wild. Unfortunately, such a possibility was proven to be true during my fieldwork. An old hunter from the village of Kosharisht (Sh) openly admitted of having shot the very first lynx he saw in his life: "*I know lynx well. I killed a lynx once… more than 30 years ago. When I saw him at first, I mistook him for a wolf. […] This happened up in Miraka Mountain. I feel very guilty of having killed such an animal but there's nothing I can do now. I had never seen something like that before.*"

The presence of lynx was often attributed to past times with a number of locals claiming that they used to be present in their areas several decades ago; however, they assumed the animal to be extinct by now. This was backed up by the fact that several respondents confirmed of

having heard of lynx only from older people and that they had no information of recent observations. Given this, several respondents assumed that the older generation were more knowledgeable about the species than younger people. "*I have never seen lynx myself […] I know that only old shepherds and hunters have seen them many years ago. You should ask the elderly if you want to know more about the lynx.*" a forester from Thirra (Mu) stated. A shepherd from Llanga (Sh) claimed: "*Yes I know 'rrëqebullin' [the lynx]. We call it 'skrebëll' here, however, the elderly know more about them and have seen them. I've never seen one.*"

There was an almost universal agreement among locals in the two areas that lynx do not cause damage to livestock. This was connected with the view people had on lynx as animals that live far away from inhabited places, deep in the forests and high up in the mountains. Lynx were considered to almost never venture near a village or inhabited places and a lack of interactions with the animal due to their rarity and elusiveness could explain these views: "*No, [the lynx] never attacks livestock. They never enter amidst flocks of sheep. They stay away. […] They don't even attack chickens. They don't come close to the village. […] If a lynx is up in Miraka Mountain, he would stay there; he won't come down to the village*" stated a hunter from Qarrishta (Sh). Lynx were seen as animals that live exclusively in the depths of forests and away from any form of human influence. Moreover, some respondents held the view that lynx feed only on small and wild species, and therefore they questioned the lynx's ability to attack livestock at all: "*The lynx pounces on the hare, the partridge… these animals. They don't go for bigger animals. […] They can't hunt roe deer. […] They can take on foxes, however"* a hunter from Dragostunja (Sh) stated. The view that lynx were mainly feeding on small wild mammals and birds and could not take down larger wild herbivores, such as roe deer and chamois, seemed to make them less of a problem in the eyes of hunters as well. Interestingly,

roe deer and chamois are known from ecological studies to make up the majority of Eurasian lynx's diet in Europe (Breitenmoser & Breitenmoser-Würsten 2008, Breitenmoser & Haller 1993, Odden et al. 2006). In Switzerland for instance, roe deer and chamois make up nearly 90% of lynx diet according to long term telemetry studies of radio-collared lynx, (Molinari-Jobin et al. 2007).

Even among the few respondents who had knowledge of the capabilities of lynx to attack livestock, tolerant views towards these attacks prevailed. In one case a hunter from Gjegjan (Mu) had personally observed lynx attacking livestock during the '*cooperative period*'[1]. Although a witness to a depredation event himself, the hunter did not seem to consider lynx as problematic animals for livestock. He stated that lynx are so rare that cases of livestock depredation are highly unusual occurrences and, as a consequence, not a major concern for locals. It seemed that the species' rarity and perceived beauty, were reasons enough to tolerate lynx attacks, even among the few respondents who believed that lynx had the potential to be a threat to livestock.

One of the most widespread and peculiar local beliefs about lynx was their presumed ability to outcompete and exterminate wolves in their territories. This belief was strikingly consistent among respondents who had knowledge of lynx and across both study areas. Lynx were depicted as eternal enemies of the wolf, which they had the ability to kill and remove completely from their areas. "*The lynx is known as an animal that attacks the wolf. Where there is lynx there is no wolf in a radius of 2 kilometres*" stated a shepherd from Spaç village

[1] Cooperatives were a form of collectivisation of farms, livestock and other village properties that were established between 1946 and 1967, during the initial period of the communist regime in Albania. After 1967 and until 1990 there was virtually no private agriculture in Albania and all farming activities were state-run by the hundreds of cooperatives established across the country (de Waal 2004). Locals in rural Albania often refer to that period as the "cooperative time" in daily conversations.

(Mu). Another shepherd who kept his sheep up in the *stani-s* of Kusar (Sh) during the summer was of the same opinion: "*Where there is lynx there is no wolf. Lynx can kill wolves and they don't let them near the places they live. Because lynx is present around my stani, wolves are very rare*". There was no particular group of respondents who held this view more than another as I had confirmations from shepherds, hunters and foresters alike. A forester from Dorëz village (Sh) stated: "*I have heard that the lynx stays up a tree and pounces on the wolf from there. The lynx kills the wolf. […] In all these areas up there (in Shebenik) where lynx live, there are no wolves, or they are very rare. One has to be more alert of the wolves down here in Librazhd-Katund, Gizavesh, Gorreje… more than up in mountains, where the lynx is.*" Respondents would often correlate the rarity of wolves in their areas with presence of lynx and stated this as an undeniable fact: "*I have heard from old people that the lynx kills the wolf. The fact that wolves are so rare around here is because lynx are present. The wolf has its enemy behind*" stated a farmer from Librazhd-Katund (Sh). This believed ability of lynx to kill wolves, combined with the perception most people had of lynx as a carnivore that is not damaging to livestock or simply too rare to cause significant damage, made them a favoured animal among respondents who knew the species. As wolves were considered the most problematic carnivore for livestock (see below), having lynx around areas where people grazed and kept livestock was actually viewed as quite beneficial for livestock husbandry. "*It is a pity that lynx are so rare. Where there is lynx, the wolf is very rare. Lynx is the primary enemy of the wolf,"* stated a farmer from Qarrishta (Sh), implying that if more lynx were present, wolves would be less of a problem for villagers. A farmer from Librazhd-Katund (Sh) saw in lynx the only solution to controlling the wolf population: "*I would not like wolves to be here, I would put up poison for them […] There is no way to exterminate wolves… they multiply like dogs.*

Only the lynx attacks wolves, it is the only one that could control them." A hunter from Librazhd (Sh) described the deep hostility of lynx towards wolves in the way that lynx would kill wolves: "*The lynx would wait in ambush. He would never chase (the wolf). He would kill the wolf but not eat him. He would kill the wolf and leave him there to rot. The lynx would never eat the wolf. He would just kill him because it's his hasëm*[2] *(enemy) and the lynx hates him. […] He would slaughter the wolf and leave him on the spot*". Moreover, respondents held the view that it is only lynx that can kill wolves and never the other way around. Lynx were always portrayed as victorious over wolves, even though respondents acknowledged that wolves were physically bigger than lynx. The lynx's ability to climb a tree and its cat-like agility, were seen as advantages in an eventual confrontation. A shepherd in Kusar (Sh) remarked: "*The wolf can never kill the lynx. The lynx can climb up a tree and flee from the wolf. Moreover, the lynx is a cat. Can dogs kill a cat? They can't and the cat is smaller… the lynx are even bigger and that's why wolves stay away from them.*"

These views on lynx-wolf relationships could potentially explain why lynx were sometimes seen as problematic when it came to dogs, and in particular hunting dogs. Some respondents expressed the view that lynx would kill dogs if threatened by them or encountered in the forest. As with wolves, lynx were thought to have an innate hatred of dogs according to recurring opinions between respondents: "*They lynx is damaging towards dogs in particular. They rip them apart. If they find dogs, they would kill them.*" This view was, however, primarily shared by few hunters I talked to, who had particular concerns about their well-trained *zagars*[3]. The

[2] The word '*hasëm'* is used here for enemy. *Hasëm*, in Albanian, is used to describe a long term enemy; a blood feud that goes beyond individual enmity but expands across families and across generations.

[3] *Zagar* is a collective term for hunting dogs in Albania and the wider Balkans.

hunter from Kosharisht (Sh) mentioned above, who openly admitted to having killed a lynx thirty years ago, later during the conversation justified himself that he had to shoot the lynx because it '*was being very aggressive towards his zagars*'.

Predominantly, the feature of major concern around lynx was their rarity. Their rare status seemed to evoke a sense of compassion and responsibility among respondents: "*I feel sorry for the lynx. It is such a rare animal. It is a pity*" stated a hunter from Qarrishta (Sh). The carnivorous nature of lynx and any potential threats coming from it were overlooked and tolerated by the common view that they were rare and endangered animals. I sometimes asked respondents if it would be right to kill a lynx that had been proven to predate on livestock. Virtually all people I asked were against this, being of the opinion that even if lynx are proven to kill a few livestock, these kills should be tolerated and lynx should not be punished for them, primarily because of their rarity. Hunters, in particular, would talk about feelings of awe if they were to encounter a lynx in nature and, unlike for game species, pleasure would only be limited to their observation. The majority of hunters highly condemned the killing of lynx because of their rarity, and were of the opinion that encounters with lynx should be enjoyed as lucky sightings. "*The lynx is the most wonderful animal. He is my favourite. They are so rare. I would never want to shoot a lynx, I would just love to watch them and enjoy. [I am] like those people who pay millions to go and watch a sport they like, I am very passionate […] I would never shoot a lynx even if the world came to an end.*" stated a hunter from Dragostunja (Sh) who claimed to have encountered lynx in the wild. Benevolent feelings toward lynx would go as far as expressions of a pet-like care by respondents. Several of them expressed the desire to take personal action in helping lynx to survive and multiply: "*If I knew where they [the lynx] live, I would go and put out food for them myself,*" stated a farmer from Librazhd-Katund (Sh).

Rarity of lynx went hand in hand with their beauty when it came to benevolence shown towards the species. Rarity and beauty seemed to be determining factors in people's positive views of the lynx. A hunter from Elbasan commented that the lynx is a needed species for nature as it "*makes nature prettier*". Respondents who were knowledgeable of the species, consistently made remarks on the beauty of the animal. *"[The lynx is] a very, very beautiful cat… a big cat, with a very pretty pelt and generally beautiful features,*" a forester from Librazhd (Sh) stated. One of my favourite questions directed at respondents towards the end of conversations would be to ask them to pick which one between bears, wolves and lynx they thought was the most beautiful animal. Lynx were, by far, the most selected species.

3.2. Bear: a gentleman with a heavy shadow

While lynx were quite poorly known among respondents, there was virtually no local whom I encountered and discussed with during fieldwork, who did not know what bears were. In addition, most people had had some form of visual interaction with bears, by either observing them in the wild or in captivity. In general, bears were perceived to be widespread, abundant and with stable or increasing populations: "*Bears are everywhere around here. In recent years they seem to have increased a lot in numbers*" stated a hunter from Puka (Mu). There were, however, a minority of people who believed that bears were instead rare and decreasing and this opinion was mainly shared among foresters: "*In Librazhd it is said... there is an opinion... that there are many bears, but in fact there aren't that many, and for several reasons they have been decreasing […] The main reason is because many habitats have been destroyed… the*

places with wild plants on which they feed on, or with wild fruits especially." – forester, Librazhd (Sh).

Knowledge of the ecology of bears was considerably better than that of lynx, among respondents. The majority of them were of the opinion that the bears' primary diet are fruits and plants. "… *the bears might damage corn, potatoes… they feed on such things. If they go in your orchard they would eat tomatoes, cucumbers, whatever they find. The bear eats like if it was a human. They would eat grapes as well, but we don't have any here… they like cherries a lot too*" – farmer, Gojan (Mu). Some acknowledged that bears could also be omnivores by occasionally feeding on meat as well. In regard to meat, the general perception was that bears would mostly focus on carrion or injured animals, as they were considered too clumsy and incapable of pursuing and catching live and healthy prey on their own. Interestingly a few respondents stated that bears that turn to eating meat, would become accustomed to it and seek to feed only on meat in the future. This dietary switch was seen as a turning point also for the behaviour of bears, and when this happened, they could become problematic for livestock and human safety in the future: "*The bear is not a damaging animal. They eat figs, fruits… in the forest and near the village. They do cause damage sometimes on corn. They do not eat meat, so they are not a problem. However if a bear eats meat once, than he wants it all the time and it might become a problem,*" stated a hunter from Librazhd (Sh). In terms of ways of living and space use, bears were seen as territorial and individualistic animals that divide territories among themselves and occupy relatively large tracts of land: "*It is an animal that has a huge range; one bear can occupy more than 1000 hectares of land. It is an animal that lives alone, needs tranquillity and creates a strict discipline with its environment*" stated a forester from Shkodra. This distinction was also evidenced in comparison with wolves, as the latter were

perceived as living and merging together in groups, whereas bears would always live a solitary life. Hunters, in general, seemed to be more knowledgeable of the ecology of bears compared to other respondents and had the tendency to provide factual information regarding the species ecology, even concerning issues of reproduction and longevity: "*The female bear would give birth to one or two cubs but never more than that. She keeps the cubs with her for two to three years and raises them and after that they separate. […] The bear can live up to 30 years. […] Some people say that the bear is 'as big as a horse' however I do not agree with that – they are average-sized animals. Yes, they can be heavy and reach weights of up to 300 kilograms, however this is because the bear is stocky and have 'dense' meat and a lot of fat,*" – hunter, Qarrishtë (Sh).

People's perceptions of bears were characterised by a sense of respect towards the animal. Many respondents used words of praise when talking about bears by referred to them as "*majestic*", "*giant of the forest*", "*brave*", "*strong*" as well as described them as "*respectable*" and "*trustworthy*".

Bears were particularly seen in a positive light when they were compared with wolves, which happened in almost every conversation. Bears and wolves were consistently contrasted with each other when it came to their predatory nature and damages that they cause to locals. Bears were predominantly perceived as an example of well-behaved animals that do not take any more than needed, contrary to the wolves, which were seen as indiscriminate, insatiable or wasteful killers (section below). The two were frequently paired as complete opposites where the negative qualities of wolves would be contrasted with the positive qualities the bears had on the other hand. For instance, the general perception of attacks on livestock was that bears would "*take one, and leave*", whereas wolves "*would kill many, but take only one*". "*The bear*

does not cause any trouble. They might kill a livestock animal or two, but this is nothing. The wolf instead is very dangerous. If the wolf attacks a flock, they would kill 10-15 livestock at once." stated a farmer in Dorëz (Sh). Contrasting bears with wolves in regard to damages on livestock was quite popular among respondents. The general agreement was that bears take as much livestock as they need (usually not more than one), whereas wolves would kill an excessive number, even though at the end they only need to take one: "*The wolf is a damaging animal. The bear as well, but to a lesser extent. […] As they say, the wolf would kill 99 sheep and leave only one alive, whereas the bear would take only one sheep… as much as he needs"* – shepherd, Lunik (Sh).

The positive qualities of bears when compared with wolves were not just seen in the few and tolerable amount of livestock which they would take, but also in the ways people perceived that bears would handle livestock in cases of attacks. Bears were thought of having "*proper ways*" of dealing with livestock. This was based on the limited invasiveness and prudence bears showed when attacking livestock, contrary to the very invasive and wasteful approach the wolves would have. According to accounts from respondents, when bears attack they do not create havoc among the whole flock, they take the predated animal into the forest for consumption and they cover the remains with leaves or bury it for later consumption. An illustration of this distinction between attacks from bears and wolves comes from a shepherd in Kodër-Spaç (Mu) who had one of his goats disappear three days before I met him. He had not seen the perpetrating animal himself, nor found signs or remains of the goat's body, but he was convinced that the goat was attacked and consumed by a bear and not by a wolf: "*If it would have been a wolf [taking the goat], there would have been signs. Wolves would bite one goat here, throw another one on the ground there, it would be a mess! All the goats would get*

scared and jump like crazy! Whereas the bear can take a goat without scaring [the whole flock]. They take one and bury it for later. The fact is that, there were no ravens flying at all on that day. This means that the bear had buried the goat."

Attacks on livestock by bears were considered to be a rare occurrence, and even when they happened, they were not viewed as a major problem among locals but largely accepted as a fact of life. This was often true even in cases when respondents reported having suffered themselves attacks from bears. The few attacks on livestock were perceived as something which is bound to happen in areas where bears are around: "*I had damages from the bear last year. The bear took two sheep. This happened on the slope that faces Rrajca – as they say there are plenty of bears there. The bear is a predator and they need to eat as well. […] If they don't have anything to feed on in the mountain, they will have to find something else, that's normal!*" stated a shepherd from Pishkash (Sh). The shepherd from Kodër-Spaç, mentioned above, claimed to have suffered damages from bears on multiple occasions over the years. This fact did not seem to have established negative feelings in him towards the bear, as might be expected. On the contrary, he constantly appeared to have a very high opinion of bears throughout our many conversations and instances of bear attacks were independent of this opinion. The act of a bear taking a goat or sheep from his flock was not perceived as an act of attack, but rather more like an act of him conscientiously giving the livestock to the bear: "*The bear is my friend, Sandër*[4]*. I love the bear a lot, sincerely. I am not saying this because you have come here and are asking me about this, but because that's how it is. The bear has taken*

[4] Short for 'Aleksandër' in Albanian

livestock from me and I have said 'ja bëftë Zoti hallall'[5]*. I have the chance to kill the bear at any time, if I want to. I can hide at that spot and wait for him to come and kill him. But this means that I'm a bad person. It is a sin to kill the bear. They have what to feed on and they do not disturb you. However, if you bring 200 goats on his table, he will take one, obviously!*"

Tolerance towards bear attacks seemed to be dictated by perceptions of place and belonging attributed to the animal. Respondents clearly distinguished places where bears live, or were supposed to live, by describing them as animals of the forests and mountains. Bears were creatures living at higher altitudes. The mountain is "*the home – shpija – of the bear*" stated several respondents. One shepherd in Shebenik remarked that it was very unusual that bears had been observed as far down as near the town of Librazhd in the last year. Venturing of bears far out of their usual living spaces in the mountains, towards places seemingly unthinkable for them to be, such as near towns and cities, were baffling to many respondents. Observations of bears outside of what people considered normal bear territories were interpreted as a sign of anomaly, something out of the ordinary, or a consequence of external – primarily human – influences and disturbances in their home territories. A forester from Gjegjan (Mu) seemed baffled by a recent incident involving a bear being killed by a car on the highway from Rrëshen to Reps. To him, the only explanation as to why a bear would come down to such low altitudes, was because their habitats up in the mountains had been destroyed by people and bears could not find enough living space and resources anymore.

[5] An approximate translation is 'May God give it to you heartily (halal)!'. 'Hallall' comes from Arabic and is used in Albania as well as an idiom for something that is permitted and righteous, as well as for something that has been earned through merit. In this context, the shepherd uses it for expressing that he would give the livestock to the bear with all his heart and that the bear had earned righteously the sheep taken.

The unusual wanderings of bears by coming "*down to the villages*", and enter into territories which were considered exclusive domains of people, were the primary source of concern in regard to them. As long as human domains did not intermix with bear domains there seemed to be no problem whatsoever in between the two.

This division between what people considered being the home of the bear on one hand and human territories on the other also seemed to explain the somewhat lower level of tolerance in cases of bears damaging crops and fruit plantations. Arable lands, fruit plantations and orchards are found around and within villages in both study areas and are considered village territory. Several respondents reported that bears venture near villages and cause significant damage to corn fields and fruit tree plantations. In general, this was seen as more of a problematic behaviour by bears than livestock attacks. While hardly anyone considered bears as problematic for livestock, almost everyone accepted that bears might cause considerable damages to crops. One hunter from Qarrishta (Sh) noted: "*If you compare the damage from both [wolves and bears] they are equal. This is because the bear does not damage livestock, but they do damage crops. Wolves do not damage crops. So, they are both culprits.*" Concern about crops was higher also because there was a widespread belief that if a bear came down to a corn field once, they would make a habit of it and come down to feed regularly on the same field. This gave the perception of continued damage over time. Respondents reported of actively engaging with field protection measures such as fencing, guarding and lighting fires: "*I have a parcel planted with corn nearby. A mother bear and her two cubs come every night to feed on corn. They have damaged more than 200 corn plants. They have also damaged the branches of the plums I have planted around the field. So now I have to guard the field every night by lighting fires all around. There is nothing else you could do to the bear – only fire can*

keep them away," stated a farmer from Dorëz village (Sh). Damages to fruit plantations were the reason for which a farmer from Kuzhnen village (Mu) admitted to having killed a bear in the past: "*I have snared a bear once. […] One time, 4-5 years ago, the bear came down to the village, and this had never happened before. The bear destroyed all the fig trees, even inside my house! He destroyed and ate all the grapes in my vineyard. I followed the tracks to find his path and set up a snare with a thin but strong wire. The bear was caught on the very same night. A fellow villager came afterwards to skin the bear.*" This extreme case of retaliation was however not the norm of how people dealt with problem bears – in fact it was one of the very few cases I was able to recollect where one respondent openly admitted to having killed a bear for reasons of damage. The same farmer did not seem to have any particular feeling of hatred against bears; on the contrary, he defined bears as "*beautiful animals*" that need to be preserved, along with all other animals: "*We should categorically preserve them! […] Even he [the bear] wants to live! It was great that hunting was stopped*[6]*. It is a sin in the eyes of God to kill animals*". The episode in question where he had snared a bear himself did not seem to influence this belief and the whole act of killing the bear for damages on fruit trees was seen as detached from the latter values he put on bears and the fact that he considered the killing of animals to be a sin.

Besides feelings of discontent, many respondents would nonetheless show a great deal of tolerance even towards crop raiding cases: "*Yes, they [bears] do cause damage from time to time. They would come down and enter the corn fields. All animals need to live. It is not a major problem. Like the bear, all animals need to feed somehow*" – farmer, Librazhd-Katund

[6] In March 2014, the Albanian government started enforcing a ban on all hunting in Albania for a period of two years. The intention was to stop the widespread and rampant poaching in the country and improve hunting legislation and management bodies in the meanwhile. I discuss some aspects of this ban in Chapter 6.

(Sh). Instances of crop-raiding were described as occurrences in which bears come out of their normal behaviour and territories and decide to come down to villages as a last resort for finding food. These compassionate feelings based on the bear's right to live and find food, were quite prevalent among the respondents in the two areas.

Fear was also an important element of peoples' perceptions of bears, as several respondents described the bear as a dangerous and fearful animal. There was a general understanding that bears have the potential to be a threat for people's safety, however almost all respondents acknowledged that this would happen only under some very particular circumstances. "*The only occasions I would fear a bear are when one messes with her cubs or if the bear has been injured [by a human]*" stated a beekeeper from Kuzhnen (Mu). The most widespread view was that bears would attack a person only if that person had provoked or harassed the bear to begin with. "*If you don't harass/disturb it, it won't harass/disturb you back [po nuk e ngacmove, nuk të ngacmon]*" was a commonly used phrase among respondents to describe this relationship with bears. "*I have seen bears four times in person. The bear has never been dangerous to me. I have even been without a gun, going from one village to the other, when I encountered one and nothing happened. All four times I have encountered a bear nothing has happened. If you don't harass the bear, he won't harass you*" stated a hunter from Gojan village (Mu). It would seem that in cases of attacks on people, the latter were usually held responsible for the incidents as only provocative actions from people were believed to trigger attacks from bears. A recurring story of a bear attack that I heard in villages around Shebenik was from a couple of decades ago and had happened in the nearby region of Martanesh, where a villager was heavily mauled by a bear. The attack, as described by several respondents, was an extremely aggressive event, in which the bear apparently attacked the villager by "*ripping his scalp off*", however,

he still managed to miraculously survive. In spite of the traumatic event, most respondents seemed to agree that the victim had it coming, since he was the one to provoke the bear by throwing stones and sticks at it on encountering it in the forest. The above hunter from Gojan village further told a story on a bear attack that had happened recently: "*There was a case in Lumzi (village), where a woman was attacked by the bear. However, it was a provoked attack and the woman was injured because she harassed the bear. The bear came near her flock of sheep and she started throwing rocks at him. That is why the bear attacked her. Luckily there were dogs, which saved her. Six dogs saved her. She remained severely injured on the head, on the neck and it has been more than six months that she still hasn't recovered properly. The bear is a powerful beast.*" Another situation that was described by several respondents as being potentially dangerous for people's safety was encountering a mother bear with cubs. "*Last year, in Kokreva, there was an [bear] attack. One guy tried to cut short from a [known] trail and ended right into a bear's den. The bear was there together with her two cubs. The mother attacks him, grabs him, bites him and beats him, however at the end he manages to escape from her. The guy survived the attack but spent 22 days in the hospital,*" stated a hunter from Dragostunja (Sh). Locals were aware of the ability and determination of female bears to protect her young and that they would indiscriminately attack anyone who posed threats to their cubs. "*I encountered a mother bear with cubs once. I was lucky because the cubs run away and went down the slope, and the mother went after them, otherwise she would have ripped me apart. She had two cubs and they were big… bigger than a dog,*" a shepherd from Lunik (Sh) recalled. Albeit evoking fear and posing threats for people's safety, this behaviour of female bears was predominantly seen as a normal feature of the bear and interpreted as a predictable reaction stemming from maternal instinct. "*The bear is a wild animal but not aggressive towards*

humans. They can be dangerous, in cases when it's a mother with cubs, but this is normal as they want to protect their young" stated a cheese-producer from Librazhd-Qendër (Sh). It seemed that respondents, who had personally been threatened by bears or were involved in dangerous situations with them in the past, had the tendency to show elevated levels of fear towards the animal. "*Yes it [the bear] has even attacked me! […] I thought to escape, flee... I didn't think much more. This happened in 1978, when we were managing the forests in Surrel... the workers were walking and the bear stood in front of them... we noticed it was together with cubs. This happened in Zeba (mountain)... sorry in Bena pass... The bear started breaking branches and we, normally, stepped back. It was impossible to continue working on that day as the terror was high [among workers]. She was angry and roaring, throwing wood, branches... stones... whatever was in her way... She charged the group, but the run was not very long... for like 50-60 meters downhill and then she stopped. It was only after we stopped and gazed at her from a distance that we noticed the cubs... there were two of them... then she moved away from the place and walked to higher altitudes. […] To tell you the truth, I am slightly afraid due to this experience... but before that I didn't care... Now I am afraid, and I am more careful when I walk in the forest.*" a forester from Kukës vividly recalled.

Such cases were not the norm however and, in general, encounters with bears in the wild were perceived and described as exciting events by the respondents with a mixture of fear and respect towards the animal. One forester from Librazhd (Sh) remarked that the bear has a "*heavy shadow*" [*ariu e ka hijen e rëndë*], which is an expression used in Albanian to imply that something is grim, frightening but also imposing and respectful at the same time.

A distinguishing element of interactions with bears was that they were the only species of carnivore that were largely addressed as humans in cases of encounters in nature. A recurring expression among respondents was that one needs to call the bear "*Uncle Ali [Daja Ali in Albanian[7]]*" and acknowledge their presence by saluting them or telling them to go away. This was most prevalent among respondents in Shebenik: "*The first time I saw a bear I was 8 years old. I told him 'Hey Uncle Ali, do not harass me' (hej, daja Ali, mos më nga!). God showed him the way and he went away. […] I have heard that one has to call the bear 'Uncle Ali' from the elderly. I do not know why we call him that, but I had heard this as a kid from the elderly"* stated a shepherd from Pishkash (Sh). Another shepherd in Kusar (Sh) described an encounter he had with a bear along the same lines: "*The bear is dangerous only if you harass him. I have encountered a bear at the pass of Kusari. The bear was not more than 20 meters away. I shouted 'Hey, Uncle Ali!' [hej, daja Ali!] and 'Uncle Ali, go away! Uncle Ali, go away!' [Ik, daja Ali! Ik, daja Ali!] and the bear left. […] I do not know why we call them Uncle Ali, but I've heard this from others and that is how we call them.*" When I asked why they would give a name to the bear in particular and not to other animals, the shepherd went on to further note: "*They say that the bear used to be a human at some point, but then something went wrong and it became a bear. That is why they call him Ali – he has a name. No other animal has a name, like the fox, badger, lynx, boar or whatever else.*"

These parallels between bears and humans were quite prominent in discussions with locals. Many respondents highlighted features of bears that made them human-like such as the ability to stand upright on their hind feet ("*the bear can stand up on its hind legs, like a human*") and

[7] 'Daja' is the maternal uncle in Albanian (brother of mother). The name "Ali" is very similar to the word for 'bear' in Albanian: 'Ari'

being an omnivore ("*the bear eats everything, just like humans do*"). Their affinity with people and human-like behaviour were further evidenced by the ability to handle surrounding objects like stones and logs. Bears were seen as the only animals capable of using such objects, usually for self-defence when provoked by people: "*My father once told me how he encountered a bear once near the stream of Kimza. He stopped, bent down to pick up a stone and the bear picked up a stone as well. He then dropped the stone and the bear dropped the stone as well and went away. So, the bear is like the human*" a hunter from Gojan village (Mu) recalled. The abilities to 'beat' and 'throw' were heavily emphasised by respondents when describing attack instances from bears: "*There was one case when a bear killed a horse here. It happened at night… the horse was tied next to that livestock pen… a bit further up the hill. The bear came and charged at the horse. It completely destroyed it… because, you know, the bear has this particularity, that he beats the animals. It was a very strong horse as well. […] The bear cannot jump because it is heavyweight. So the bear can only grab the horse and hit him. The bear had beaten him. [The bear] probably took some wood or stone and beat the horse*" stated a stani shepherd from Lunik (Sh) describing a recent bear attack on a horse. The ability to make use of their limbs for purposes other than moving across the landscape, was a unique feature of bears compared to other carnivores: "*The wolves would attack a cow at the neck; that's where they go for. The bear would beat the cow with its paws instead*" – shepherd, Pishkash (Sh).

Humans were at times compared to bears as well: "*We (people) here are a bit like the bear. We work during the summer and spend winters in the house, like the bears [spend winters] in a cave*" a farmer from Fushë-Studa (Sh) stated.

A widespread belief among locals was that one has to give way and open the path to the bear if faced with it in the forest. The person had to let the bear pass, by climbing on the higher

slope, or going on higher grounds, from the path and watch the bear pass from there – going on the higher slope when giving way to the bear was extremely important as this was the only way to ensure that the bear would not attack the human. If the human would go on the lower slope, or lower grounds, of the path then, it was believed that, the bear would most certainly attack. "*I have encountered bears personally several times. Once I was out hunting for boars. At the end of the valley there was a cave and inside of it, there was a bear. The bear got out when I approached and stood up on its hind legs. I took to the side and climbed on the higher slope to give way to the bear. […] I went upwards because one has to avoid coming face to face (ballë për ballë) with a bear, otherwise the bear will attack and bring you down*" stated an old hunter from Kosharishta (Sh). While some spoke of this action as in the form of a belief or superstition that would prevent the bear from attacking, others simply talked about it as a simple act of kindness and respect being shown to, and being shown from, the bear, much like two gentlemen would give way to one another if trying to go on the same way. A hunter from Fushë-Studa (Sh) stated: "*The bear would open the path to the man if they would come face to face on a narrow trail… it would let the man pass.*"

A common expression used by respondents to describe eventual confrontations of bears with hunters (or any person with a hunting gun while going by the forest) was that "*one cannot kill a bear with a hunting gun – çifte*[8]*"*. This phrase was mostly used in its literal meaning, as many respondents believed that *çifte*-s were not effective enough in killing bears due to the latter's thick skin, fat layers and generally robust bodies. Hunters would regularly describe situations which had turned dangerous the moment someone had attempted to kill a bear by shooting

[8] '*Çifte'* is the traditional hunting gun used in Albania, referring to a double-barreled rifle. The word '*çifte'* literally translates as 'double'

with a *çifte* and, evidently, not managing to kill it. "*The bear cannot be killed with a çifte. You need to have more advanced guns. You can't do anything to it with a çifte. It is dangerous if you shoot at him, because it has a lot of wool and if you injure him, he would attack you. He would hit you with sharp stones. Only if you have a 'gun with (projectile) bullets*[9]*' you can shoot him from a distance of 100-200 meters and kill him. The çifte cannot penetrate his wool and fat – he might die later, but not at the moment and this might be dangerous. The bear won't let you to re-fill the çifte*" stated a hunter from Gojan (Mu). Nonetheless, besides the literal meaning, the phrase seemed to have a double meaning, implying that the *çifte* – a gun conventionally used to hunt game animals – was not adequate to be used for killing bears; creatures that, according to local perception, did not belong to the 'game or wild animals' category. Bears could only be killed with guns which were designed and intended to be primarily used on people.

Bears were the only predator to whom respondents vested behavioural and personality features which are normally attributable to humans. As illustrated above, people chose to *talk* to the bears if encountered in the wild, which was a unique feature not observed with other wild animals: "*Never use the gun [when encountering bears in nature]. You just talk to the bear and do not threaten it*." – hunter, Dragostunja (Sh). This was linked with the prevalent belief that bears were *understanding* of human speech, actions and intentions – as opposed to wolves, for instance, which many respondents defined as animals that *did not understand* and were considered to be disobedient to humans. The ability to *remember* was highlighted as another extraordinary feature of bears in comparison with other animals. Respondents associated this ability to subsequent actions a bear would take if, for instance, harm is done to them or their

[9] As opposed to cartridges with pellets, which are commonly used for hunting.

cubs. Several respondents suggested that it is not wise to provoke the bear and make it angry as they would *remember* and *take revenge*. The ability to seek vengeance, was in itself another aspect of humane behaviour that respondents widely extended onto bears. A shepherd from Spaç (Mu) remarked: "*My old father and mother have been faced with the bear and the bear has done nothing to them. This is because every time I have been faced with the bear, I have done nothing to him. […] If you harass the bear then he will be vindictive later to your family, to your father and mother*". Another shepherd from Pishkash (Sh) recalled: "*In 1983 or 1985 they caught a couple of bear cubs not far from my stani. The mother bear got really angry and hung around the village all year round, attacking cows and everything else on her way. It was actually a cousin of mine who found and took the cubs out of the den. He sold both of them for 25 thousand leks. I do not know where he sold them… maybe to the zoo… I do not know. However, that year the mother bear was being very dangerous around the village, she even attacked people. The bear does not attack you for no reason, but if you take her cubs and harass her she will take her revenge.*" A hunter from Stebleva (Sh) recalled a fairly similar story, which had happened in the village of Tërnova in the nearby region of Martanesh. According to his account, the cub had approached two villagers on its own and out of curiosity, while the mother was not around, and the villager had captured it and brought along to the village; presumably for selling and making a profit out of it afterwards. Reportedly, the mother bear, upon realising that her cub had been stolen, had become "*very angry*". For more than a week, the mother bear had been wandering through the areas around the village, presumably searching for her lost cub and behaving aggressively towards people. A group of villagers from Stebleva (Sh) mentioned a case of a vengeful bear which had happened in the area in 1992. The bear had been caught in a snare and when people went to check and, presumably, kill the

bear, the bear got so angry that it managed to break the snare and kill two of the people present there. The bear continued to cause havoc around the village for more than two years after the snaring incident, until some hunters killed it.

The overall positive attributes of bears in terms of their non-intrusiveness, especially when compared to wolves, had earned bears a high reputation in the eyes of locals. This, coupled with the general anthropomorphising of bears, was reflected in the way how people referred to and interacted with them. The bear was an animal which could be spoken to, would understand and was expected to respond. Many respondents referred to bears as "*gentlemen*" (*zotni*) that "*have honour*" and "*manliness*" (*kanë besë; burrni*). This vesting as a respected figure meant that bears abided by certain rules and acted according to acceptable human standards. As such, interactions with bears seem to be regulated by the same local rules and customary codes that regulate interactions between humans. A hunter from Qarrishta (Sh) once made the remark that "*the bear should be put in the corner*", when comparing it with other animals during our discussion. While at first it might seem that the emphasis on 'corner' might imply a malicious intention as the corner might represents an unpleasant location and a discriminatory place, in Albanian "putting someone in the corner" is used as an expression implying that someone has been put in the most honoured location of the room or table; the top of the table. Effectively, according to Albanian traditional customs, family guests and friends (*mik, miqtë*), when invited in the house, are placed at the corner of a table, and this represents a sign of honour and hospitality towards the guest. By putting the bear in the corner, the hunter was implying that he considered the bear to be his *mik* (friend).

The familial (*uncle-daja Ali*) and social (*gentleman-zotni, friend-mik*) features vested to bears in highland Albania meant that bears were integrated within the local moral community.

Human-bear relationships seemed to be largely dictated by customs and traditions that regulate human-human relationships in these two areas. Reciprocal trust (*besa*) is a strong element of customary codes in Albania and several accounts from respondents suggested that it was a custom that extended to human-bear relationships as well. An account from Valbona Valley in Northern Albania tells how a man in the region was given the nickname '*i pabesa*' (the untrustworthy) after killing a bear from behind. The story, said to have happened a long time ago, tells that a Dedushaj (family name) family member was faced with a bear while walking in the forest one day. They both walked peacefully past each other on the same trail but Dedushaj turned around and shot the bear in its back; a cowardly and treacherous act. From that day, locals referred to him as "*Dedushaj i pabesa*", a disparaging nickname which was later transferred to all of his family members.

A hunter from Fushë-Studa (Sh) told me a story along the same lines, involving his uncle and a bear and the reciprocal trust between the two. The event seemed highly unlikely to have occurred in real life in the way described by the hunter, however, it highlighted aspects of mutual trust that humans and bears are presumed to put on their interrelationships in highland Albania. The hunter's uncle was working as a logger in Prevall (a forested area near Fushë-Studa) several years ago. On one occasion wolves approached him while he was walking from the forest back to the village and he had to quickly climb on a tree nearby to avoid confronting with them. As the story went, there happened to be a small young bear up on that tree as well, that was, similarly trying to escape from the wolves. Apparently the wolves had been chasing the small bear and were not after the hunter's uncle, who just happened to be at the wrong time and place. The bear tapped the hunter's uncle in the shoulder in an attempt to say 'stay calm, let the wolves pass, and we'll be safe', however the man was so scared in this unexpected

situation up in the tree that he instinctively threw the bear out the tree. The wolves devoured the bear in seconds. They did not leave after killing and eating the bear, but were waiting at the same place, presumably for the hunter's uncle to give up and come down the tree. The man tied himself around the tree and spent the night sleeping up in the branches. In the morning the wolves had left and the hunter's uncle came down the tree and walked to the village. However, he realised that he had done something horrible by throwing the bear out of the tree. Nightmares involving the bear being devoured by wolves haunted him and he could not sleep for days. "*He had betrayed the bear*" stated the hunter.

3.3. Wolf: a troublesome paladin

Wolves were the most problematic and disliked species of all three large carnivores among locals in both study areas. As evidenced throughout, comparisons with bears in the section above, wolves were often seen as complete opposites of bears. Wolves were defined as "*insatiable*", "*ravenous*", "*sneaky*", "*intrusive*", "*cowards*", "*thieves*" and "*untrustworthy*" among others. They seemed to evoke quite negative feelings among respondents who were quick in identifying them as the most problematic animals around.

In similar ways to bears, wolves were a well-known species, with the vast majority of respondents stating having seen them in the wild at least once in their lifetime. They were perceived as being abundant and with increasing numbers, which, unlike the reported increases of the bear population, was considered a problem in itself for many locals. "*Wolves are plentiful. I have seen wolves many times. They cause a lot of damage.*" Respondents would often tend to over-estimate or exaggerate the wolf population in their areas, based on frequent

observations and interactions that they themselves or other local inhabitants had with the species: "*Ehuu, wolves! They're in abundance. Just last month I saw one while I was grazing my sheep… actually it wasn't one, but two of them!*" – villager, Reps (Mu). "*There are plenty of wolves in the mountain. Just last year, a guy killed three of them with boar-bullets. It was a pack of four, so one managed to survive*" – shepherd, Rrajca (Sh). Most respondents had basic knowledge of some aspects of wolves' biology and ecology, such as their diet and way of living. Nonetheless, the figures they would give in respect to different ecological and physical features of wolves had a tendency to be exaggerated. For instance, the majority of respondents reported the weight of an adult wolf to be no less than 50 kilograms[10], with some believing they could reach up to 100 kilograms of weight: "*The wolf is just as big as a mule. It definitively weighs up to 100 kilos*" – shepherd, Pishkash (Sh). "*There are big and small ones (wolves)… but usually they vary from 80 to 100 kilograms*" – hunter, Elbasan (Sh). Expressions like "*the wolf is as big as a mule/donkey*" or "*as big as a hut*" were recurring ones among respondents when they wanted to comparatively assess the size of wolves. Some respondents even held the belief that wolves were able to change their body size when attacking livestock by going from very small to very big instantaneously during an attack: "*I have seen it myself. […] I was grazing the sheep at the pass over there, some sheep had gone ahead and the others were following. I was keeping watch with my dog when I saw that the wolf was very near the flock. He had crouched and had become one with the ground. You know how small he becomes? Smaller than a zagar… like a zagar! Then when you see him getting up, he becomes as big as a hut!*" stated a shepherd in Kusar (Sh). A similar description was given by another shepherd

[10] The average weight of adult wolves in the Mediterranean region is usually between 25 to 35 kilograms (Boitani, 2000)

from Letem (Sh): "*When the wolf is about to attack, he goes down to the ground and becomes as small as a hand. He becomes as small as this mobile [shows his mobile]*". Most respondents acknowledged that wolves primarily lived in packs, however the size of the latter was, at times, greatly overestimated or to vary greatly between winter and summer. A hunter from Pukë (Mu) stated that wolf packs consist of no fewer than 10 individuals and that they congregate in packs only in winter, when they search for mates to reproduce. Another hunter from Fushë-Studa (Sh) estimated the average size of a pack to be between 30 to 50 individuals[11]. Wolves were also believed to reproduce in excess and very frequently and this was one of the reasons for their abundance according to local perception. Two hunters from Librazhd (Sh) compared the she-wolf in being "*like a female dog*" that would give birth to several litters of pups within one year. Similarly, a farmer from Librazhd-Katund (Sh) stated that it was near to impossible to eradicate wolves from their areas as they multiplied too much, "*just like dogs*".

Many respondents explained the perceived abundance of wolves by the fact that there was no form of control of wolves anymore, contrary to what used to happen during the communist regime, a time when wolves were actively controlled through poisoning and hunting campaigns. A hunter from Gojan village (Mu) vividly recalled this period of active eradication of wolves: "*Since Enver[12] died, the wolf has caused a lot of damage. Enver obliged the forestry to keep shepherds with goats in the mountain. They would poison a goat and leave it in the*

[11] Ecological studies show that the average pack size for wolves in Europe is around 7 individuals and ranging anywhere from 2 to 15 individuals. Due to heavy human control and influence, larger packs are an extremely rare occurrence in Europe (Boitani 2000). In nearby Croatia, a country with broadly similar ecological conditions and habitat features with Albania, data from official estimates on wolves present an average pack size of 3 to 4 individuals (State Institute for Nature Protection 2013)

[12] Enver Hoxha was the political leader of Albania during most of the communist regime, from 1945 until his death in 1985. People in Albania commonly refer to the communist period as "Enver's time" in daily discourse.

mountain. The fox would go to eat there and die, the wolf would go to eat there and die. People used to get rewards for killing wolves. After Enver died, no one was putting out poison anymore. At the time there used to be many hares. I used to go out hunting with friends and we would see hares among the junipers without the need of a zagar. Nowadays, I have two zagars, and I can stay a whole day in the mountain and not shoot anything. There are plenty of foxes – at the time there weren't foxes because they would eat the poisoned meat too. So the foxes would die and the hares would multiply. During Enver's time, there was no need to have protection, you could leave the sheep the whole day outside and the wolf wouldn't go amidst them. Nowadays wolves go in packs of 4-5 together. […] The wolves have increased in numbers; they have increased a lot!" In addition, a popular and recurring story among respondents concerned the belief that wolves were being artificially increased in numbers by outside entities such as government agencies or animal protection groups, by intentionally releasing captive-bred wolves in the forests. Several respondents claimed to have seen or know of 'tagged' wolves in the forest and held the view that these animals were secretly released in their area by outsiders. Two hunters from Gjegjan village (Mu) claimed that someone had released 40 wolves in their area from the back of a truck. Although, they did not know who exactly might have done this, they speculated that they were people from Tirana or from Kosovo who were 'fans' of the species and held them in captivity. Similarly, a group of villagers from Lunik (Sh) claimed in outrage that wolves with 'ear-tags' had been observed in their area, being released intentionally by other people to cause damage to the resident rural population. A villager from Rrajca (Sh) stated: "*There have been cases of wolves being released in the forest… they have tags in their ears. [I ask who would have done this?] The government, the animal protectors! I've never seen one myself, but I've heard it from other*

people… friends of mine that go about in the forest every day. [I ask how do they release them?] They release them from cars… from cages put up on cars. They transport them from zoos and release them in the forest."

However, there were also opposing views concerning abundance of wolves, with some respondents believing that wolves were not as abundant as the general opinion would suggest. A shepherd residing at one of the most isolated *stani-s* of Kusar (Sh), at an altitude of 1720 meters a.s.l. commented: "*We haven't seen wolves here recently. There are some youngsters who claim to have seen wolves two-three months ago, up there, near the border with Macedonia, but I don't think that's true. They might have seen border (patrol) dogs and mistaken them for wolves. We haven't seen wolves around here in ages. [I ask how come, given that the area seems to be perfect for wolves] The area is very good for wolves; however we have not seen a wolf neither during the night nor during the day. There are not as many wolves as most people think.*" Similarly, a young shepherd from Stebleva (Sh) remarked: "*There are not that many wolves. People say that there are many, but in fact there aren't. The problem is that even those few can cause significant damage if no measures are taken.*"

There was universal agreement that wolves are carnivorous animals. Diet composition was however quite variable in the opinion of locals. Some people held the view that wolves would feed on just about any living thing they would find on their way, a feature that reinforced views on them as insatiable and vicious killers: "*The wolf eats roe deer, chamois… all wild herbivores. There are fewer herbivores if there are wolves. The wolf is the enemy of all animals… be those wild or domestic. I only don't know if they would eat fox… otherwise they eat everything… roe deer, wild boar. He can't eat bear, because the bear is more powerful… and chamois… he can't catch them… but if he can he'll eat them*" stated a farmer from Gojan

i vogël (Mu). Several respondents believed that wolves had completely switched their diet to domestic animals in the present days since, presumably, wild prey had become extremely scarce due to heavy hunting from humans. A forester from Domgjon (Mu) remarked that wolves were more abundant on Zeba mountain (the adjacent mountain to Munella, separated by the Little Fan river in Mirdita) than they were in Munella. He believed that this was the case because there were more livestock grazing in Zeba than there were in Munella and they offered more feeding opportunities to wolves. "*The wolf has become as smart as a man. He follows livestock in search of food*" he claimed. Lack of wild prey in mountains and forests was perceived as one of the main factors that was driving wolves to attack livestock more often. Some respondents blamed uncontrolled hunting and poaching by irresponsible people as the causes of prey depletion, which was in turn causing an increase of wolf attacks on livestock. "*They also need to feed somehow*" was a recurring expression among respondents in attempts to justify depredation of wolves on livestock. Interestingly, there were among those who thought that wolves could not survive by relying solely on wild prey like roe deer, chamois or wild boar – primarily because of difficulties and efforts required to hunt these species – and that no matter what, if wolves wanted to survive, they had to resort to livestock as an easier and convenient food item. A popular comparative phrase on the prey-predator relationship between roe deer and wolves was often used by respondents to describe the above belief: "*The wolf cannot catch the roe deer… it is too fast for him. My grandfather used to tell me 'the wolf jumps 7 pashë*[13] *(in the air) whereas the roe deer jumps 8 pashë (in the air)'… so the wolf can never catch him*" – hunter, Kosharishta (Sh). "*The roe deer jumps 12 meters, whereas the wolf*

[13] A traditional unit for measurement of length in Albania. 1 *pashë* is equivalent to the distance between the two hands when both arms are fully outstretched sideways – approximately 1.5 meters.

only 10 (meters). That's why wolves can't catch a roe deer straight away… but they catch it by deceiving it (e kap me hile!)" – shepherd, Lunik (Sh). Wild boars were also believed to be quite a challenging prey for wolves. Few respondents believed that wolves were able to catch healthy and adult wild boar. "*There are roe deer and wild boar in the forest. However, the wolf can't feed regularly on them. He can catch maybe one wild boar – a small one, as the big one will rip him apart with the tusks. There was one case here when the wild boar ripped a zagar with only three movements. The boar will use the tusk as a weapon. Every female boar can have up to 10 piglets and a big male boar will guard them. The male will raise his crest if a wolf approaches and all the mothers with piglets will gather around him. If the wolf is a man, let him dare to attack! A male wild boar can weigh up to 150 kilos!*" claimed a shepherd from Prespa in Korça region. Again, wolves were thought to resort to deception and sneaky tactics in their pursuit of wild boar: "*Wolves can only capture boars by biting them on their testicles. They sneak from behind. Not only boars, but also other big animals like donkeys and horses are brought down in this way… they would go for that weak spot to bring down the animal and kill it afterwards.*" – shepherd, Kusar (Sh).

There was a widespread belief among locals telling that wolves would gulp down soil, mud, or even stones in order to make themselves 'heavier' for purposes of attacking large animals such as boars, cows and horses. In spite of the high improbability of such a behaviour occurring – and even less so for the reasons stated by respondents – respondents who claimed it, seemed to be quite convinced on its occurrence and purpose. A shepherd from Pishkash (Sh) gave a detailed account of this: "*[…] the wolves can eat up to 20 kilos of meat (in one go). It is an animal that can survive for two months without eating. They stuff their stomach with soil. When the snow falls and there's nothing to eat… because hare are also scarce, the wolf would eat*

soil. They do this to keep appetite away. I have heard it from two old hunters. They told me that they had observed how a wolf wanted to attack a boar, but could not take it down because of its (the wolf's) weakness. The wolf ate soil to make himself heavier. He then jumped on the boar, took it down, went to throw up the soil and ate the boar's meat afterwards. This is an attribute of the wolf… he would make himself heavier to attack larger animals." There were, of course, several respondents who played down this belief and considered it as completely false and deprived of any foundation: "*You shouldn't believe such things [in answer to my question on wolves eating soil]… the wolf has dexterity, he doesn't need weight to bring animals down. People are mistaken about this….*" stated a hunter from Qarrishta (Sh).

The villainous reputation of wolves was highly linked to damage they caused to livestock. Most respondents identified wolves as the main damager of livestock and a major problem for livestock husbandry in their areas. Wolves were particularly disliked because, according to most respondents, they caused excessive and unnecessary damages to livestock. The view is that if wolves got into a flock, they would kill more sheep that they need to feed and at the end they would consume only one. "*The wolf is a thief, he will take many. If you fall asleep and the wolf attacks the flock, he will kill as many as he likes. He would kill them all and leave them there and he would only take one with him for eating*" stated a shepherd in Kusar (Sh). A very popular belief among respondents was based on the proverbial saying that "*the wolf would kill 99 sheep, but only eat one*". This belief, or slight variations of it, have been documented in Albanian folklore studies (Elsie 2001) and among Albanians living in neighbouring Macedonia (Lescureux & Linnell 2010) and was quite prominent among respondents in both study areas. A farmer from Librazhd-Katund (Sh) commented: "*The wolf is a damager. I would not like*

wolves to be here. I would not mind wolves if they would take one sheep and leave, but the problem is that if they see a flock of 500 sheep and there is no shepherd around, they will kill them all and not just one." This excessive behaviour in killing livestock seemed to be at the core of their negative reputation among locals. Contrary to bears, which were largely seen as *honourable* and *trustworthy,* given their discreet approach when attacking livestock, wolves were largely defined as *dishonourable* and *untrustworthy*, primarily because of this excessive behaviour in killing livestock.

Another factor that seemed to contribute to negative views of wolves was the spatial perception that wolves were everywhere and did not have a fixed territory. Unlike lynx and bears, which people considered to be creatures of the mountain and having their own territories, wolves were considered to wander everywhere, crossing natural and human territories alike and have no fixed location to call 'home': "*The wolf does not have a home. […] If you go up there, in the mountains, where the livestock flocks are now, you will see it there today, but tomorrow it will go to another place… to Letmi Mountain, then from Letmi to Dragostunja. The wolf moves, it always moves. They always search. You'd think that because you saw it today at one place, tomorrow it will be there too, but no, it doesn't stay at the same place. It is always mobile. It has no home. The bear has a home, it stays in one area, whereas the wolf doesn't. The wolf can go from here to Macedonia, to Pogradec and to other places. It flees, it goes away. […] They do not even divide territories between themselves. They are one race; they are all friends,*" stated a hunter from Qarrishta village (Sh). The belief that wolves were perpetual wanderers that continuously crossed and transgressed boundaries set by humans between the domestic and the wild, made them very difficult to deal with and control, in the opinion of local respondents. Several respondents used expressions like "*the wolf does not wait to get*

invited" or the "*wolf has (his own) initiative*" when describing cases of attacks on livestock. This non-compliance of wolves towards human set boundaries was similar to the one observed for bears, however, while bears were considered to infringe these borders only on very rare occasions and were largely tolerated for it, wolves were perceived to engage more frequently in these transgressions and cause more damage, thus the level of tolerance towards them was lower. Respondents expressed particular concerns for cases when wolves would enter inhabited places: "*People dislike wolves because they do a lot of damage. If a wolf enters amidst a flock they would not leave a sheep alive. He would kill them all and throw them away. They have even entered villages! There was a case earlier this year when the wolf entered in the village, killed three sheep of someone's flock and the shepherd didn't even notice. The wolf can kill 20 to 30 sheep within 10 minutes*" stated a hunter from Dragostunja (Sh).

In this regard, observations from my survey showed that respondents in Shebenik and Munella largely viewed wolves as quite problematic for livestock breeding. These views seem to be consistent with similar studies done in south Albania (Marvin 2010) or in neighbouring Macedonia (Lescureux & Linnell 2010). However, throughout my fieldwork I noted that instances of damages from wolves that respondents had suffered on their own livestock were not as many as one would expect. The majority of respondents would claim that wolves "*cause a lot of damage*", however few of them would base this claim on their own experience of wolves. A few respondents were able to recollect and report actual instances of damage that they themselves had suffered from wolves: "*The wolves came to my flock about two months ago. I saw two of them. They took eight sheep from me. I only saw two wolves, but I think that they were a (bigger) pack as it is impossible that only two wolves could separate eight sheep from the flock so quickly. […] I had a dog, but the dog got more scared than me and came in*

between my legs… it is not a good dog, it is a puppy… a zagar" a villager from Spaç (Mu) stated. A *stani* shepherd from Pishkash (Sh) claimed: "*I have lost more than 50 goats, if not more, because of wolves since I started this business, six years ago.*" The same estimate was given by another shepherd from Spaç (Mu) who claimed that wolves had killed more than 50 goats of his goats in the region. However, these claims of personal damages from wolves were not the norm. In most cases, respondents seemed to base their statements on wolves as excessive and wasteful killers of livestock considering experiences of other people, recalling stories from former times or simply by stating it as common knowledge and popular belief. On quite a few occasions, when respondents would make claims on wolves as animals that cause a lot of damage, I would follow up with a question on whether they themselves had suffered any damage. A common response I received when asking this question was that they themselves hadn't had any damages from wolves recently, but they knew cases where other people from the village or the region had. "*No, wolves have never attacked any of my sheep. I've only heard from others cases when wolves have attacked*" – farmer, Thirra (Mu). This reaction seemed to be most common among farmers and daily shepherds, who kept their sheep grazing not very far from the village.

As a matter of fact, throughout my entire period of fieldwork in both areas, I was personally able to verify only one instance of damage from wolves (or from any of the three large carnivores, for that matter!) in spite of having told most of my respondents to notify me as soon as they had any damage from large carnivores, and having left my contact details with them. The victim was a donkey that had been killed by wolves near a house in Malaj village, Mirditë, in September 2014 (Fig. 3.1.).

Fig. 3.1. Donkey killed by wolves near a house in Malaj village, Mirditë, in September 2014. The owners sensed the commotions from the attack, which happened during the night, and got out of the house to scare the wolves away before they would consume most of the carcass.

On the other hand, there were quite a few respondents who held the view that damages from wolves were not as excessive as most people believed them to be. They acknowledged that wolves do cause damage from time to time, however, not to the point where they would become a problem for local economies. Attacks from wolves were interpreted as nothing out of the ordinary and an occurrence that is bound to happen in places where wolves are present.

Coincidentally, this belief was more prominent among people who were more experienced with activities in nature, such as *stani* shepherds who would usually spend half of their year (between May and October) up in the mountains, grazing sheep and producing cheese. A shepherd from Kusar, who made a living from grazing some 200 sheep in the area and producing cheese from their milk, stated that although wolves cause damage from time to time, this is nothing substantial. He remarked that, in recent years, wolves have not caused as much damage as before and that he himself hadn't had any problems from wolves. His view was shared among a few other shepherds in the region: "*Wolves are not a major problem. There are wolves around, but they do not cause that much damage. There was a case 5-6 months ago when wolves tore a goat apart, but that was the only case I've heard for this year*" – shepherd, Fushë-Studa (Sh). Similarly, a shepherd from Rrajca (Sh) noted that although wolves and bears are widely present in his area, there are very few damages caused by them: "*Some wolf, here and there, might steal a sheep or two, but this is nothing*".

While attacks on livestock were the main reason wolves were largely disliked, there was also a general recognition among respondents that attacks would happen not only due to wolf's predatory nature, but also because of people's unawareness or irresponsibility towards their flock. Locals in Munella and Shebenik took pride in protecting their property in general and livestock was no exception. Respondents considered the protection of livestock as a shepherd's main responsibility. One of the most experienced shepherds I had the chance to talk to in Shebenik, once stated: "*To the wolf you stay standing. If you sit down or fall asleep, the wolf will come and take your sheep. That's what he is paid for.*" In addition, having livestock guarding dogs was considered a must for someone owning sheep or goats. Several people commented that if flocks were properly protected by shepherds and dogs then wolves have

very little chances of attacking. Attacks were believed to happen in cases when people did not take adequate measures for protecting their flock or to inexperienced people in shepherding. "*There have been many cases where wolves have caused damage, both recently and previously. The wolves kill, yes, but look here, there is something about this. Just as much as the wolf wants to eat livestock, the shepherd takes measures against this. The aims of the wolf go in parallel with the aims of the shepherd. The wolf and the shepherd know each-others language. There is no flock which doesn't have three or four (guarding) dogs. […] People also use guns. They are themselves present (with the flock)… and given these, the wolves do not cause that much damage. Damages mostly happen with these shepherds that graze their livestock around the village and are not prepared enough, unlike mountain shepherds. But absolutely, you cannot consider the wolf as very damaging. People have sorted these issues out themselves, they have established these equilibriums*" stated a forester from Librazhd (Sh). This view was consistent among a majority of respondents, with many instances of damages from wolves being attributed to poor shepherding and lack of responsibility towards the attacked flock, rather than being blamed directly on wolves and their predatory nature. In general, in both study areas, being a 'good shepherd' was defined by the care and attention one would show to the flock and lack of attacks from wolves was viewed as an indicator of this.

Several respondents showed quite tolerant attitudes towards wolves, even in cases when they themselves claimed to have suffered attacks on their livestock. The above mentioned shepherd from Spaç, who stated to have had more than 50 goats killed by wolves, didn't seem to hold any particular negative feelings of rancour towards the wolf and once even commented: "*There is enough for me and for the wolf, Sandër.*"

The importance of having guarding dogs was highlighted by the majority of respondents. Several shepherds confirmed that the main reason to why they "*were feeding*" the dogs was to ensure protection from wolves. A good shepherd was defined not only by the care and protection towards sheep, but also by the care and responsibility towards his dogs. Historically, livestock guarding dogs in Albania are cumulatively called *stani* dogs and they are usually large-bodied (Fig. 3.2.). It is often the case that shepherds would keep a variety of dogs for guarding the sheep, including the large-bodied *stani* dogs and some smaller mixed-breed dogs. Several respondents pointed out differences between stani dogs and *zagars*, in that wolves would kill a *zagar* instantaneously, but they cannot do anything against a good *stani* dog. A shepherd from Spaç vividly described one case when his dog managed to fend off two attacking wolves: "*This happened more than a year ago. I was grazing 15 pure breed goats (dhi race) and 15 pure breed cows (lopë race) when a couple of wolves came to attack. I only had one dog at the time, the black and white one [points at the dog – at the time of this discussion he had six dogs]. The dog sensed the wolves and started barking and chasing them. The wolves got scared at first and went up the hill, but when the dog followed them, they turned back and attacked the dog. That's when I intervened and threw my mobile phone at the wolves – that is how I broke my mobile phone. The wolves went away a bit and the dog followed them again down to the road. That is where they attacked him again. I started throwing stones at the wolves. However, this made me lose sight of the livestock flock and there was another wolf that came to attack them. I had to return and protect the flock, and I thought to myself that I lost the dog. However, when I was gathering the scared livestock I saw the dog coming back. He was limping, but still alive. He is my favourite dog since then*".

Fig. 3.2. Livestock guarding dogs (stani dogs) in Munella (above) and Shebenik (below).

People's reactions to actual confrontations with wolves, highlighted aspects of how locals constructed the image of wolves, especially when comparing with similar situations of confrontations with bears. As indicated earlier, bears were largely considered to be understanding of human speech, intentions and actions, thus people would often use words and speak to them when trying to chase them away, or give way for letting the bear pass and avoid a potential confrontation. Wolves, on the other hand, were largely regarded as animals that do not understand – as several respondents reiterated – and cannot be communicated with. This was clearly reflected in people's reactions when encounters with wolves happened. Respondents stated that they would usually resort to shouting, making loud noises and throwing stones and sticks at the wolves to chase them away. Some even admitted that if they would have a gun with them the moment they encounter a wolf, they would, in all likelihoods, not refrain from shooting at them.

In spite of the generally negative reputation wolves had among locals, at times, respondents showed appreciation towards some aspects of the animal. Their intelligence, in particular, seemed to be highly valued among locals, even when it was used for intentions judged as malicious by people, such as attacking livestock. In regard to this, their collaboration as a pack when hunting, was seen as an indicator of their smartness and success as a predator. "*The wolf is the most intelligent due to its method of hunting. It doesn't hunt alone but in packs. The leader goes in front and the other wolves approach the prey form the sides. This collaboration makes them very intelligent […] They use sneaky tactics when attacking. Within a pack of wolves, only one wolf would attract the attention of the shepherd that is guarding the livestock. While the shepherd will focus on that wolf, the other members of the pack will attack the*

livestock" stated a hunter from Fushë-Arrëz (Mu). A shepherd in Kusar (Sh) commented that wolves were smart animals due to their ability to communicate and have a common language between each-other and that is how they could perform coordinated attacks as a pack.

Respondents would sometimes point out behavioural characteristics of wolves to describe their intelligence. A farmer from Gojan (Mu) seemed highly impressed by the fact that wolves would walk on top of each-other's track in snowy terrain, in order to save energy, and he considered this to be a very smart behaviour. He had personally observed this behaviour on Tërbuni mountain, by looking at the tracks of a passing pack on the snow layer. The same farmer further stated: "*The wolves are smarter than any other animal in the forest. If the wolf is walking in the woods and if he accidentally steps on a stick or leaf and makes noise, he would bite his own leg for the mistake done. They are very quiet when they walk and they can pass by being totally un-noticed*". The expression "*the wolf bites its own leg*" was a recurring one, used by respondents to emphasise the wolf's smartness, and also their heightened sense of wariness. "*The wolf is a smart animal. It doesn't have a strong nose (sense of smell)... but it has a strong hearing... as a good hunter, almost like a huntsman when is ambushing animals... I have even heard that it walks so carefully and slowly than when it makes a noise it bites its own leg*" – hunter, Elbasan (Sh).

A few respondents, mainly foresters, pointed out some positive qualities of the wolf, based on their ecological functions and role in the ecosystem. Their role as 'cleaners of the forest' in that they would eat the carcasses of dead animals, was particularly appreciated: "*We should not completely exterminate wolves because they too have a role to play in nature. They need to be managed though. Wolves do things, which other animals wouldn't do. If there are carcasses of animals around wolves would clean them up, so they are needed for the*

ecosystem" – forester, Dorëz (Sh). "*There are benefits of having them in the region. There is a mentality that every bad thing has a good thing and vice-versa. It might happen that some animals die… bears and wolves would eat them… so they act as cleaners, and that is a direct benefit to people*" – forester, Librazhd-Qendër (Sh).

One of the most particular and striking perceptions that people had of wolves, was the belief that wolf attacks on livestock were not just a matter of chance or bad luck but were, instead, intentional and controlled events. Here, I am not referring to the worldwide popular belief that wolves would hunt down the weakest animal within a flock – although there were a couple of manifestations of this belief as well – but rather more about the idea that wolf attacks would happen on command from a higher power, often explicitly said to be controlled by God. I encountered this belief initially from respondents in Shebenik, and did not attach particular importance to it, thinking it was an isolated case of superstition. However, throughout my ethnographic exploration, the topic came up in more and more discussions with locals from both study areas. The belief was also quite consistent in the way respondents explained it. Locals believed that wolf attacks on livestock were not dictated by chance; instead wolves attack on purpose the livestock of people who have committed sins and wrongdoings in their life. In such cases, wolves would be sent by God (or simply it was claimed that they would be 'ordered from above') to attack the livestock of sinners as a sign of retribution for their wrongdoings. The same thing would happen to people who do not show signs of generosity (like giving food – meat – or money) towards poor people and did not help people in need, especially if they have more than enough for themselves. Wolves would come and attack their livestock, by taking more than what they could have potentially given to people in need.

However, if they would choose to help people in need and show generosity towards them, then their flock would flourish and prosper. Wolves were, as such vested with a role of agents, as paladins delivered by higher powers, with the intention of punishing people who had committed wrongdoings. A hunter from Dragostunja (Sh) told me that in previous times people used to ask themselves and ponder on any possible sins that they had committed if they suffered an attack from wolves: "*Ku bana haram, që më ra ujku? (Where did I commit haram*[14] *for the wolf to come to me?)*" In one conversation with two villagers from Librazhd-Katund (Sh), I expressed my concerns about the way how locals would leave cows to graze out in the fields and in the mountain freely and without any supervision from shepherds. One of them was quick to point out that they were not worried for this because they knew that wolves would only attack cows that belonged to people who had become *haram.* To illustrate his statement, he recalled a story involving a man from Koçhysaj neighbourhood, who in their opinion was a person who had committed many sins in his life. Even though there were lots of livestock around and many *stani*-s in the mountain, wolves would only attack the cows of that man; in total he had lost 5 cows to the wolves, according to the two villagers, while others in the village did not suffer any damage.

To further illustrate this belief, in the following paragraphs I quote some respondents who commented on it in more detail:

"*[…] because you should know something. The wolf and the snake don't take anything without an order from God. For instance, I have plenty of sheep, but the wolf doesn't come to take my sheep. He goes and takes the sheep of that other guy, who has committed sins (bart gjynahe). The snake is the same*" – shepherd, Letëm (Sh).

[14] Sin. Commit a sin.

"*I speak for myself. I am a Muslim. This story that that old guy has told you is true. We say here that the wolf 'eats when he's ordered'. There have been cases when a wolf has entered amidst a flock of sheep and has not taken any at all. This has happened on multiple occasions. The wolf would eat the sheep of that person who becomes haram. How do you become haram? Let's say, for instance, that I have 100 sheep. A poor person asks me: 'Give me one lamb to eat'. I would refuse them: 'Go away, I do not have a lamb for you.' In that case, I have committed haram. If instead I would give them the lamb, my flock will flourish even more. Or, if I speak more generally, if people who have plenty in life, not just livestock, but also money and other things, and do not give to the poor even 10 thousand Leks*[15] *then they become haram. If you give, your wealth will become bigger. It has happened also during the cooperative period. There would be a poor guy who would ask the chairman of the cooperative for a sheep to eat. The chairman would send him to a designated shepherd to ask for one with his recommendation. The shepherd would not give him a good healthy sheep, but a scabby and thin one instead… to 'clean' his flock. This was haram as well. We need to clear our hearts. If you have a flock of 200 or 300 sheep, you should give one or two to the poor; if you don't then the wolf will come and pick the best sheep of yours to kill*" – shepherd, Kusar (Sh).

All respondents to whom I talked about this belief of wolves attacking "on command" confirmed having knowledge of it. The extent to which they actually believed it or not varied greatly, ranging from superstition or myth among a few, to some being totally convinced that wolves would behave in such a way. I initially evaluated that the education level of a respondent was linked to the amount of consideration and acceptance they would show towards

[15] The currency of Albania.

this belief, with the more educated people having higher chances to consider it as a superstition or myth and the less educated ones actually believing that wolves would act that way. This seemed to be the general trend, however most respondents – no matter the education level – seemed to use this belief during conversations and when trying to explain the context and nature of wolf attacks.

The view of wolves as animals that attack when commanded from above was very frequently linked with their definition as "*gojëmbyllur*" (closed-mouth), "*gojëlidhuni*" (tied-mouth) or "*i pagoji*" (the mouthless one), which were, at times, used by participants as synonymic names for wolf. Linguistic scholar Robert Elsie has documented this euphemism for wolves in his studies of Albanian folklore and mythology (Elsie 2001) and I was able to consistently recollect it from respondents in both areas. Explanations given by respondents in regard to reasons the wolf would have his mouth closed or defined as such, usually converged on two main reasons. The first was linked with the belief that wolves would attack only on command 'from above'. Several respondents claimed that God would control the mouth of the wolf and not let it open unless an attack was commanded: "*The gojëmbyllur thing… I explained this to you; I don't know whether you understood but it has to do with the fact that the wolf eats on command. The wolf has a closed mouth when it does not have an order to attack. I have witnessed it myself, but also others have told me that that a wolf has entered a flock and not killed any sheep because its mouth has been closed. That's why that wolf is called gojëmbyllur*" – shepherd, Kusar (Sh).

"*People say that if a wolf enters a flock of livestock but doesn't eat any, then its mouth had been shut. We say that it is from God that its mouth had been shut. The wolf is controlled by*

God, and that is why people say 'Thank God, the wolf came to my sheep but didn't damage any!'" – forester, Thirra (Mu).

A shepherd from Letëm (Sh) told the following account:

"[…] at that trail over there, where you came from, my uncle was walking once a long time ago and had taken a goat with him from Zabzun. There was deep snow and he was carrying the goat on his shoulders. At that slope over there, he encountered some 30, or even 40 wolves. It was a big pack. My uncle threw the goat at them with the hope that the wolves would attack the goat and not him. The wolves howled and the goat ran back to my uncle from fear. None of the wolves moved from their place. My uncle shouted at them, but they did not move a beat. They did not attack the goat or anything. This is because they were gojëmbyll, as I told you before. It must have been because their mouths were closed; otherwise it is impossible that they would not attack the goat. It happened because the goat belonged to a poor man who had done nothing wrong in his life. The wolves did not have an order from God. Without an order from God, nothing is done."

A shepherd from Spaç (Mu) claimed to have personally observed a wolf with a 'closed-mouth' entering his flock. He described how the wolf would run amidst the sheep and throw them "*up in the air*" with his snout, without being able to bite them. Several respondents stated that the wolf would have a 'closed mouth' around certain periods of the year, usually in winter months between November and February. Some respondents were more specific and claimed that this period was around Saint Martin's day (11th of November). In Elsie's study of Albanian folklore and religion (2001), Saint Martin is known as the patron saint of shepherds and their herds, which he protects against wolves. A shepherd in Munella told me that he would pray to Saint

Martin every day before releasing sheep and goats from the pens, to graze in the mountain: "*Ishalla ja msheli Shën Martini gojën*[16]"

The second reason that wolves would have a 'closed mouth' had to do with the shepherd's (or person's) vigilance when being present in the forest and mountain and was related to visual interaction. Several respondents claimed that if one is vigilant and sees an approaching wolf before the wolf would see them, then they would have closed the wolf's mouth and the wolf would have not been able to attack them or their flock. However, if the contrary would happen – i.e. the wolf would be the one to see the person first – then the wolf would close that person's mouth. The person with a closed mouth would have not been able to shout and scare the wolf off, or even scream for help from others and given this, the wolf would be free to attack that person's sheep undisturbed. Some respondents associated this with the belief that the wolf is able to "*take one's voice away*" and "*freeze/immobilise a person on sight*". A shepherd in Kusar (Sh) commented that this happened not because of panic or fear from the wolf, but it was an innate attribute of the wolf: "*The wolf can take your voice away. He blocks you. Your voice would be gone.*" A forester from Qarrishta (Sh) claimed to have personally experienced this 'loss of voice' in one occasion he had encountered wolves as a child. He recalled that this happened while he, together with some friends, was grazing cattle in the pastures around the village. One of the calves had gone missing and he went on a search to find it: "*[…] I walked back along the trail to find it, as that calf always used to follow me. That is when I saw the wolf. At that moment my voice went away. I was trying to shout to my friends for help, but I could not. I was completely blocked. Then after a while, it was by pure instinct… and I bent*

[16] Translation: "*I hope (in Allah's willing) that Saint Martin will close its [the wolf's] mouth*". The shepherd used a combination of a Muslim prayer – Insa'Allah (in Allah's willing) – with a Christian saint. The expression 'ishallah' is commonly used in Albanian language by members of all religions and non-believers alike.

down, picked up a stone and threw it to the wolf… after that I could shout… and my voice came back. The wolf then flew, went up the slope and stood on a rock. I went back to my friends and the wolf was looking at me the whole time. He kept looking at us for the whole time we gathered the cattle and went back to the village."

3.4. Concluding remarks

The aim of this chapter has been to summarise the main perceptions and beliefs about lynx, bears and wolves as they emerged from my ethnographic explorations in highland Albania. The ethnographic approach that I undertook for this research made it possible to uncover perceptions and beliefs about large carnivores which were previously completely unknown to me, even though, prior to this research, I had worked for the conservation of large carnivores in Albania, and the wider Balkans, for almost a decade. My former research that required the involvement of locals in conservation had been primarily quantitative in nature (Chapter 2). While these quantitative surveys had generated valuable information on the locals' perceptions of, and attitudes towards, large carnivores, they could not reveal many of the beliefs and perceptions that have been presented in this chapter and which seem to play an important role in the ways locals construct and relate to these animals. The findings presented here offer important contributions for the conservation of large carnivores in Albania and the wider region. It is often assumed that local beliefs and perceptions of large carnivore species are, in great part, misconceptions that lead to a negative construction of these species and contribute to increasing conflicts between locals and predators. For example, such is the case of the exaggerated fear from wolves from beliefs that they attack and kill people far more than they

do in reality (Linnell et al. 2002). Ecologists and biologists working for the conservation of large carnivores often seek to rectify such beliefs and misconceptions through findings from ecological research (Silva et al. 2013). Educational and awareness-raising campaigns for large carnivores conducted by conservation organisations are largely based on information coming from ecological research. The presumption with such an approach is that by revealing the biological truths of these predators to the local population, misconceptions and beliefs that might be detrimental to the image of predators will fade over time and this will in turn help to improve the acceptance of predators by locals. The findings presented in this chapter suggest that careful considerations should be made with such approaches from a conservation and management perspective. While many of the local beliefs and perceptions of large carnivores and their behaviours were indeed exaggerations and misconstructions, there were other beliefs which were quite beneficial to the image of predators and included many benign aspects. The widely-believed ability of lynx to deter wolves from their areas, the belief that bears were acting in discreet and well-behaved ways when taking livestock and the belief that lynx are unable to kill livestock are prime examples that put these animals in a positive light when it comes to relationships with locals, even though they have almost no foundations in the ecology and biology of these animals. Some of the local beliefs seemed to bring benign elements even for wolves, which, of all three large carnivores concerned, evoked the most negative feelings among locals. The belief that wolves were creatures that do not attack livestock at random, but rather those belonging to people who deserve to be attacked, seemed to be quite favourable to their image.

Many of the beliefs about large carnivores presented here, even though unfounded in ecological realities, seem to be quite beneficial to maintaining coexistence between people and

predators and avoiding conflict escalation. Conservation organisations and institutions working for the preservation of large carnivores should carefully consider the benefits and pitfalls of ecological information alongside the benefits and pitfalls of local beliefs about large carnivores, especially when designing and implementing education and awareness-raising campaigns.

A careful reading of many of the local beliefs on large predators, suggests that large carnivores seem to be integrated in the moral community of humans living in highland Albania. Local people's perceptions of, and relations with, these animals, seem to be largely governed by moral and customary principles that regulate the social life of people living in these areas. This was most noticeable in the locally-perceived spatial relationships between people and predators. People's perceptions of places where carnivores live, belong, or should belong, will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

"*No one may enter the house without giving notice of his presence in the courtyard.*"

– Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini (Gjeçovi 1933)

4. Perceptions of spatial relationships between people and large carnivores in highland Albania

In this chapter I argue that local people's perceptions of, and relationships with, large carnivores in Albania are not defined simply by instances of damage, but more by the place where they occur and the way that they are manifested in different places. I will discuss how damage caused by carnivores in the two study areas is interpreted, treated and dealt with by local people according to customary and historical codes which are traditionally used to regulate the lives of people in mountainous regions of Albania. In doing this, I seek to demonstrate that there is no intrinsic or continuous conflict between large carnivores and people in Albania, but merely impacts or damages which are viewed as either 'normal' or 'unacceptable' depending on the place where they occur. The management of, and solutions to, these problems are also spatially dependant and are provided according to local customary traditions.

4.1. Bears at home

The widespread local perception on the spatial distribution of bears in both study areas was that they are animals that live in, and belong to, 'the mountain' – *mali* or *bjeshka*. The mountain (often interchangeably called 'the forest' - *pylli*) represents the obvious and natural place where bears occur and live their lives according to almost all respondents. Many of them portrayed the mountain as being "*the home of the bear*" and made clear distinctions between bears living "*up there*" and people living "*down here*". This separation of territories dictated that the bear's territory is 'the mountain' or 'the forest' and the human's territory is the village and agricultural fields around and within it, usually found in valley bottoms and lower altitudes. This perception of the spatial division of living territories between humans and bears seemed to explain the general lack of damage from bears, according to many respondents. A forester from Gojan village (Mu) remarked: "*Bears have never caused damage to livestock here. I live in the village, so I would know. Although, we here, prefer to graze our livestock on lower altitudes and around the villages and not up in the mountain where the home of the bear is. […] Most of the villages are at low altitudes, maybe up to 800-900 meters but not above that.*" Altitudes above 800-900 meters were considered as territories deemed normal and adequate for bears to live, according to the forester. The village-mountain territorial division between people and bears was a recurrent explanation, from respondents, of lack of damage by bears. Several of them claimed that instances of bears attacking livestock happened only when people took their livestock up in the mountains to graze. "[…] *In regard to livestock, the bear is not very damaging. Those few cases that might have happened have been high up in the pastures or the border between pasture and forests, when people graze their livestock for a long time. Even in this case, shepherds have been conscious of the possibility of damage, as those areas are home*

to the bears and it is expected to encounter them there," a forestry official from the town of Shkodra stated. Two hunters from Puka (Mu) also claimed that bears had caused damage to livestock that year, because shepherds were keeping their livestock near the beech coppice areas [*imshtë*] up in the mountains, where, allegedly, bears rest and hide during the day. A hunter from Qarrishta village (Sh) stated: "*Bears do cause damage to livestock, but very rarely and only up in the mountains. It never happens in the village.*"

The perception that bears do not venture in people's territories was clearly expressed by the discussion of very few cases of bear attacks on beehives in both study areas. Respondents acknowledged that bears have a preference for beehives and if given the chance would attack and destroy them to get to the honey and larvae; however, such an occurrence was very unlikely, if not impossible. This was attributed to the local particularities of beekeeping, which is mostly practiced inside the fenced courtyard of a village house and often even separately fenced within the courtyard (Fig. 4.1.). Several respondents claimed quite confidently that bears would never trespass these limits and break into someone's garden and in general they would not even venture so close to human habitations. "*The bear has not damaged beehives here. It does not come as far down as the village. No one leaves beehives in the mountain. In the mountain the bear can only find beehives that are inside oak trees… wild bees… otherwise he has no chance to get them.*" stated a hunter from Gojan i Vogël (Mu). This perception was prevalent among respondents in both study areas. Bears were perceived to almost never, or very rarely, venture inside a village, and even less so inside the fenced courtyard of a house. A forester from Dorëz (Sh) claimed: "*No, no! Bears do not damage beehives. People keep them near their houses. No one is bringing and leaving hives up in the mountain… like I've heard they do in Greece… here, if they do that, the hives might also be stolen by people."* Instances

when respondents claimed that attacks on beehives would occur, were linked to hives being either kept away from the house or near the forest. "*The bear destroys beehives, especially if they are left far away from the house. He shatters them (the hives) completely. […] I have a few hives myself, but never had any damage from bears as I keep them near the house.*" stated a hunter from Qarrishta (Sh).

Fig. 4.1. Beehives kept next to a barn, inside the fenced courtyard of a house in Stebleva (Sh).

A forester from Thirra (Mu) reported a case of attacks on beehives, which had apparently happened because of their proximity to the forest: "*There have been damages on beehives by the bears. In my village, in Thirra, there was a case earlier this year. There were two families who kept beehives above the tunnel, in the highest area, and the bear once came down from the forest and damaged two hives. The hives were kept very near the forest. The bear didn't*

open the hives on the spot but dragged them 50 meters into the forest and ate all the honey and bees. […] The owner had to stay (awake) and guard the hives the following nights." More professional beekeepers who specialised mainly in honey production for profit and engaged with seasonal transport and migration of hives up in the mountains were rare. During my fieldwork, I was able to identify and converse with only two specialised beekeepers. One of them had set up camp in the meadows above the village of Kimza in Munella and owned "*some 40 hives*"[1], kept there throughout the summer to make use of the flowery pastures of Munella. In autumn, he would take the beehives down to his house in the village and keep them around the house throughout the winter. This beekeeper confirmed that bears had often approached the place he kept his beehives and commented on this behaviour as nothing unusual given that he had come to the "*territory of bears*". He stated to have never suffered any attacks from bears on his beehives, linking it to the fact that he always fenced the hives with metallic wires. He believed that wire fences were a good deterrent for bears as, allegedly, bears were afraid of metallic objects according to his statement. In addition to fencing, the beekeeper stayed next to the beehives all the time himself and owned two small-bodied dogs that acted as alarms in cases of animals or people approaching the camp.

Bears were further seen as highly territorial animals, in keeping separate territories not only with humans but also between themselves. Several respondents claimed that bears would have a fixed 'home' territory in the mountains and that they would not mix these territories with other bears, unless they were a 'couple'. A forest warden working in the Shebenik-Jabllanica National Park claimed: "*The bear is a territorial animal. They stay in one place. They stay in*

[1] Beekeepers in Albania usually do not reveal the exact number of beehives they own. An approximation would be given instead (such as a dozen, a few, or about 10, 20 or so) as there is a widespread belief that giving away the exact number of hives would cause their diminution in the future.

Kosharishta, in Qarrishta and so on. […] For instance in Shapka there are two – there is a couple there – in Kliza there is one – there was even one case of livestock depredation there. In Hotolisht there is another one, in Fusha e Hasanit another one and in Rinas another one. There are definitively more than 10 bears in the Park. Their dens are in the middle and their territory is around the den." A similar statement on the fixed places bears occupy in the mountains was given by a hunter in Qarrishta (Sh): "*I would say that there are 30-40 bears in all these mountains from Stebleva to Rrajca. I can also tell you where they live, at least for Qarrishta. In Qarrishta there are several bears. There is one in Letmi slopes, one in the Red Mountains, one in Shapka area and also one in Gështenjas area, where one bear goes to hibernate there in a cave. […] there are bears also at the caves in Kusar and Fusha e Hasanit. Some caves are known as places where bears live and some others are yet undiscovered, because you have to track the bear to find where it stays.*" The perception that bears use caves as denning sites was a recurrent one. This was also evidenced by the many caves which were given the toponymal name "cave of the bear" [*shpella e ariut, shpella e arushës*] as pointed out by several respondents. Hunters, in particular, would often state precise locations, usually caves in the mountain, for which they had knowledge of individual bears living inside.

This profiling of bears as creatures that have a 'fixed home' in the mountain, clearly separated by the home of people (the village), seemed to give them a right of ownership over those territories. The majority of *stani* shepherds I had discussions with, acknowledged that they were keeping and grazing their livestock inside a territory which they considered to belong to the bears. They were aware that by bringing their livestock to graze up in the mountains they were trespassing into the home of the bear. Potential damages on their flocks were therefore argued to be accepted consequences of this unannounced trespassing. Any form of retribution

by the bear's side was seen as a normal and tolerable consequence, given that shepherds had no permission to enter the bear's home. If a bear attacked and killed livestock that graze up in the mountains (or inside forests), shepherds would comment on this as something that is bound to happen, without any apparent signs of revolt or anger towards the attacking bear. One shepherd from Spaç (Mu) stated that it is nothing extraordinary to lose one goat to the bear if one brings a large flock of livestock up in the mountain, which is known to be the bear' place: " *[…] if you put 200 goats on his [the bear's] table, he will take one, obviously!*". Similarly, a shepherd from Pishkash (Sh), mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, who had personally lost livestock to bears stated: "*I had damages from the bear last year. The bear took two sheep. This happened on the slopes that face Rrajca – as they say there are plenty of bears there. The bear is a predator and they need to eat as well. […] Sometimes for consolation [when bears attack], I say to myself that it is actually my fault, because I have come to their place. This is their place. I have come from the lowlands and occupied their place [in the highlands]*."

Cases of bears venturing inside abandoned villages were, however, not seen as a form of bear transgressing into human territories. Several respondents confirmed such cases, stating that bears would enter these villages to feed on the remaining fruit trees. Albanian villages have been facing dramatic population declines since the collapse of the communist regime and mountainous areas have been affected by this the most (Carletto et al. 2004, King & Vullnetari 2003). In some areas, whole villages have been completely abandoned, or reduced to a handful of inhabited houses, because of mass migration towards larger towns, the lowlands and even abroad. Although completely abandoned villages were not prominent in my study areas, occasional discussions with respondents from other regions in Albania, particularly from the south-eastern and north-eastern parts of the country, where human depopulation has been most

severe, indicated that cases of bears venturing inside abandoned villages were quite common. One logger from Vithkuq village (located in Korça region, SE Albania) recalled several occasions in which bears had ventured inside the nearby abandoned villages of Çemerica and Faqekuqi and were regularly feeding on plum and apple trees that were formerly harvested by people. In one of my visits in Gur-Spaç village at the foothills of Munella Mountain, I was able to verify myself evidence of bears coming down to an abandoned neighbourhood of the village to feed on abandoned mulberry trees through scat identification (Fig. 4.2.).

Fig. 4.2. Bear scat near an abandoned house in Gur-Spaç village (Mu). According to a local shepherd, one bear was regularly visiting the abandoned neighbourhood, to feed on the fruit trees that had been planted and used by people when the village was inhabited.

One of the most interesting accounts recurring among respondents in both study areas were presumed observations of bears actually taking over abandoned houses in villages and using them as shelters or dens. The recent human migration out of villages seemed to have opened up space for bears not only in terms of feeding resources, but also as actual living spaces, as according to several respondents, bears were increasingly making use of abandoned buildings

for habitation. This occurrence did not seem to be interpreted as transgressive behaviour by bears into human homes as, in the view of local people, abandoned houses and lands no longer represented a human territory. In fact, some respondents actually legitimised cases of bears taking over abandoned human houses as an acceptable and normal behaviour. A group of villagers from Qarrishta (Sh) claimed that one female bear had made a shelter in one of the abandoned houses at the edge of the village. They were able to point to this specific house, which was located at the westernmost side of Qarrishta, in a neighbourhood that was now "*completely abandoned*". Moreover, the she-bear was supposedly observed by one local to even have had given birth to two cubs inside the house. A similar account was told to me by a farmer in Librazhd-Katund (Sh): "*A she-bear has started to sleep at the (abandoned army) tunnels at the mountain pass over there. People have seen her go inside the tunnel at 5 in the morning and have seen also the little cubs peeking out of the tunnel and being very wary.*" Shepherds who would bring their livestock into these abandoned lands expressed the view that they now belong to 'the bears' and as a consequence any potential damages would be explained under this new ownership of land and therefore tolerated and accepted as such. "*People have left this area, Sandër. A lot of families have left because of blood-feud problems, but also because of other problems. They have all gone. Now all these lands are left to the bear. The bear has claimed it now, so if you bring livestock here it is normal that it will attack them sometimes.*" stated a shepherd from Gur-Spaç (Mu), while we were walking across the abandoned part of the village with his flock of goats.

In contrast, while bear attacks on livestock grazing in mountains were largely tolerated and accepted by people, and often interpreted by locals as expected and normal occurrences of humans trespassing and venturing into what they considered to be the 'bear's home', instances

of crop raiding or damages to fruit trees in and around the village were tolerated to a much lesser extent, if at all. Discussions with locals frequently indicated that such cases would cause greater controversies with bears. Crop plantations are often fenced and occur on arable land parcels that are located in between village houses or around the built village depending on the topography and location of houses. Moreover, fruit trees are mostly planted within the fenced courtyard of the actual home building – with the fence representing the de facto border of a particular house. It is important to mention here that, the definition of a house in rural Albania, is not limited to the building structure of a home, but also to the extended space around the building, marked by a fenced courtyard within which other structures and elements, such as barns and sheepfolds where livestock are sheltered, doghouses, silos, beehives, cultivated gardens, etc., are found. The border of the house is, in essence, the border of the courtyard. Furthermore, there were spatial differences between Munella and Shebenik in consideration of the extent of what constitutes 'a house' and how it is integrated in the surrounding landscape. In Munella, the borders of houses are more spread out and the amount of land included within these borders is greater than in Shebenik. This was the main reason that the spatial extent of villages – by definition as a conglomeration of different houses in proximity to each-other and with social and familial links in between – were larger in Munella compared to Shebenik. In Shebenik houses within villages were more segregated and closer together, which made easier the identification of boundaries between villages and natural habitats (Fig. 4.3), whereas in the region of Munella houses were more spread-out in the landscape and merged with natural habitats such as forests and scrublands, which made boundaries between the village and natural habitats blurrier and not so clear-cut (Fig. 4.3.).

Fig. 4.3. Fushë-Studa village in the northern part of Shebenik-Jabllanica (above) and part of Mushta neighbourhood in Mesul village, southern Munella (below).

While in Munella within the de-facto border of a house, it was possible to include arable land, fruit tree plantations and even small patches of forest, in Shebenik the border of a house did not usually extend to include arable lands (and almost never patches of forest), which were usually located around the built-up section of the village. However, in spite of the spatial setting, croplands and fruit tree plantations were perceived to be a contiguous part of the village in both regions, an exclusive 'humans-only' area, clearly separated from what is considered to be the 'bear's home' in the mountains or forests.

This clear separation between territories acting as 'human home' and 'bear home' seem to explain the higher antagonism shown towards bears when they leave their normal and expected home territories located high in the mountains and transgress into human ones located down in the villages. While discussing with a shepherd from Pishkash (Sh) at the beginning of my fieldwork, it was surprising for me to find out that even though he had suffered recent damages from a bear, which had taken two sheep from his flock while grazing them up in the mountain, he seemed to be more accepting of that damage, than the ten corn plants, which a bear had damaged last year by going inside the crop-field next to his house. There seemed to be no economic reasoning behind these attitudinal differences, as the financial value of two sheep is far higher than that of ten corn plants. Such discrepancies towards different damages caused by the same species can only be explained by the breach in the established spatial relationship between the shepherd and the bear. Whilst the attack on livestock was justified by the belief that he had brought the sheep into the 'bear's home' and thus, had transgressed into the bear's territory, the crop raiding from the bear's side was considered a transgression of the bear into the shepherd's home. The shepherd's stance on his home and the perceived 'bear's home' seemed to explain the tolerance showed towards the two depredated sheep (occurring in the

'bear's home') and the intolerance showed towards the corn raiding (occurring in the shepherd's home).

The few cases of retaliatory killings of bears that I recorded throughout the field research in Albania were fully linked with trespassing of bears into 'human space' and causing damage to crops and fruit trees. One of the few respondents, who I referred to earlier in Chapter 3 and who openly admitted killing a bear, was a farmer from Kuzhnen village (Mu). He confessed killing the bear because it had damaged fruit trees inside the courtyard of his house: "*I have snared a bear once. […] One time, 4-5 years ago, the bear came down to the village, and this had never happened before. The bear destroyed all the fig trees, even inside my house! He destroyed and ate all the grapes in my vineyard. I followed the tracks to find his path and set up a snare with a thin but strong wire. The bear was caught on the very same night. A fellow villager came afterwards to skin the bear.*" The bear's violation and breaking into the farmer's house for consuming figs and grapes was enough of a reason to engage the farmer in a retaliatory punishment of the bear. However, the same farmer did not seem to hold feelings of rancour towards bears as a species in spite of the raiding suffered on his property. He frequently spoke kindly and respectfully of the bears, describing them as "*beautiful animals*" which have the right to live and which we should preserve for the future. Neither the damage caused to him, nor the retaliatory measure he took afterwards seemed to have influenced his positive attitudes to bears. The events that led to snaring the individual 'culprit' bear were detached elements from his general perception of bears and were intended to put justice in place between the individual farmer and the individual bear, rather than an expression of hatred against the bear population as a whole or bears as a species.

Accounts of bears being killed as a result of trespassing into what were considered human borders or even house borders were recurrent in both areas. A potato farmer and merchant from Klenja village, mentioned that one individual bear in her area had become habituated to continuously coming down to the village and entering into people's gardens. She stated that this incurred a reaction from the village and a group of people set off to snare and kill the bear, which they eventually did. Another case of bear killing was reported from Kosharishta village (Sh), where a hunter stated to having snared a bear some 7-8 years ago due to the frequent crop raiding incidents it was causing in the village. A group discussion with villagers from Fushë-Studa (Sh) pointed out that although bear damages on crops are not a prevalent phenomenon for their region, if they do become serious and frequent, then measures need to be taken against the offender. "*The bear should be executed if this happens.*" stated one of the group participants.

In cases where a bear attacked livestock inside a village, village fields or other human territories away from its perceived normal 'home' mountain or forest, equally similar retaliation measures against the perpetrating bear would apply. Cases of bears breaking into sheep-pens or barns within the village were considered very rare occurrences among respondents. However, when such transgressions occurred they would trigger the same retaliation measures against the bear, as in cases of crop raiding inside or near human homes. "*I have killed two bears. I killed one even in Enver's time and I had to bury it because at the time you could go to jail for up to 3 years for killing the bear. […] The bear had eaten two oxen earlier [in the village]. It subsequently tried to enter in a sheep pen. I had a 20 millimetre gun with me and shot at it. Pam! Pam! Twice. The bear ran away and the dogs chased it, but*

they were scared as the bear was (injured but) still alive." a hunter from Dragostunja (Sh) recalled.

The above accounts illustrate that the spatial circumstances of bear attacks on human property played an important role in how locals perceived, interpreted and responded to them. The perception of whether an individual bear was doing something wrong by attacking human property was not dependent on the sheer economic value of the damage or the amount of damage done, but rather more on the transgression of bears into what locals considered an exclusive 'human home' away from their perceived 'bear home'. If damages occurred in the bear's home instead, up in the mountains and in the forests, they tended to be more readily accepted and tolerated by locals, who in some cases clearly took responsibility over such damages, by acknowledging that they were the ones at fault by transgressing into the bear's territory.

However, it is important to mention that while this spatial relationship was the general pattern of how locals perceived, interpreted and reacted to bear damages, there were also individual variations between locals. Not all bear attacks on livestock in the mountain were happily tolerated by all locals, as not all damages on crops near the village were followed up by killing the perpetrating bear. The "bear home" vs "human home" territorialisation seemed to be a crucial element for governing the relationship between people and bears in general, in both study areas, however there were also exceptions to this pattern. In some cases, financial loss seemed to be diligently noted by people who had suffered damages from bears. A shepherd in Kusar (Sh) was evidently upset and angry at the fact that the bear had killed his horse, with a value of "*3 million leks*", even though the attack had happened in the pastures near his *stani* up in the mountains and not in the village. Moreover, a shepherd from Letëm (Sh) stated that he

had made a decision to not plant corn around his *stani* this year, because of the worry that the bear will come to eat it. His wife had planted some salad vegetables last year and they were all destroyed and eaten by bears.

Bears venturing outside their 'home' areas up in the mountains and coming down to villages were seen as abnormal and isolated cases coming from individual bears exhibiting an odd behaviour. In some cases, respondents were of the opinion that this anomaly in bear behaviour was actually induced by humans and their influences in bear home habitats up in the mountains. Several respondents were blaming human-caused forest destruction and exploitation in the mountains as reasons that were driving the bears outside of their normal home territories. Human impact on forests held people accountable for odd bear behaviour. A forester from Gjegjan (Mu), mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, blamed a recent case of a bear being struck by a car on a highway, on the fact that their habitats in the mountains have been destroyed by people: "*The bears have started to come down to lower elevations recently. We have seen one that was hit and killed by a car on the highway in Reps, in the section between Reps and Rrëshen. […] So, you can imagine, if the bear comes down that low, they have no other choice, they have nothing to feed on… it is a big problem. The forests have been cut down in the mountain and the bears are forced to come down. Here they are also in more danger of being killed by people, as they can enter in people's properties and houses. […] Also the fires in the forests during the summer… they make the bears go away. The bear does not return again to that place [which has been burned]*". A shepherd from Pishkash (Sh) explained damages coming from bears as a consequence of lack of food in their 'home' territories, presumably due to human destruction of these habitats: *"[…] the bear is a predator after all. If they do not find anything to eat up in the mountains they will have to find it elsewhere.*" Similarly, a hunter

from Rrajca (Sh) stated that bears are forced to come down to the village because "*nothing is left*" up in the mountains for them to feed on, given that humans have destroyed large parts of the forests which provide food and shelter for bears. The perception of the linkages between human destruction of forests and forcing of bears outside of there was present also outside the two main study areas. In a group discussion with villagers from Ziçisht in Devolli region (SE Albania), participants pointed out that the local perceptions that bears have increased in numbers was wrong, and in fact, they had instead become very rare. One respondent confirmed that people believe bears are increasing because they observe them more and more often coming down to villages. He went on to explain that this was happening because of the destruction of forests up in Morava Mountain, which had left bears with no foraging options in their home areas and had forced them to venture near villages in search for food.

4.2. Homeless wolves

While bears were largely perceived to be territorial animals, with fixed home locations in mountains and forests, wolves were seen as their complete opposites; being frequently described as animals that had no home, continuously moving across the land and crossing human and natural borders without any regard or distinction in between. The antonym position of wolves with bears came up in almost every conversation with locals and in both study areas. Their vagabond behaviour was at the core of their portrayal as problematic species and a crucial factor in the perceived wrongdoings of wolves. A hunter from Qarrishta (Sh), earlier mentioned in Chapter 3, made clear distinctions between wolves and bears when describing the territorial

and roaming behaviour of the two: "*The wolf has a characteristic. It has no vendbanim*[2]*. I speak for our area at least. If you go up there, in the mountains, where the livestock flocks are now, you will see it there today, but tomorrow it will go to another place… to Letmi Mountain, then from Letmi to Dragostunja. The wolf moves, it always moves. They always search. You'd think that because you saw it today at one place, tomorrow it will be there too, but no, it doesn't stay at the same place. It is always mobile. It has no vendbanimi. The bear has vendbanimi, it stays in one area, whereas the wolf doesn't. The wolf can go from here to Macedonia, to Pogradec and to other places. It flees, it goes away. […] They do not even divide territories between themselves. They are one race, they are all friends. […] The bears do not stay together… they might share one area, but they do not stay together.*" Such contrasting comparisons of the territorial and transient behaviour of bears and wolves were frequent and recurring among respondents. "*The wolves come and go. They do not stay in one place. They also come from Macedonia… they come and go from there […] whereas the bear is an autochthonous animal. The bear stays here, they stay in one place. For instance, they stay in Qarrishta, in Kosharishta and so on.*" a forester from Dorëz village (Sh) stated. Wolves were perceived as creatures that perpetually wandered the landscape in search for food, crossing every form of human-defined border: "*The wolves are always moving. They can stay 2-3 months in one area and when they do not find enough food, they move to another area. They can come from Macedonia and from other places.*" stated a shepherd in Kusar (Sh). A hunter from Elbasan (Sh) remarked: "*Here, the wolves were almost exterminated at some point, but recently they have come back. They migrated from the east... from Macedonia, from Greece.*"

[2] Place of residence, home

Wolves seemed to be clearly disfavoured compared with bears because of the perception that, unlike bears, they had no place to call home, did not divide territories neither with humans nor between themselves and their continuous wanderings made them difficult to deal with. As such, wolves, contrary to bears, did not seem to adhere to local rules of territoriality and property division.

Transgressions of wolves into human spaces were consistently evidenced throughout my ethnographic exploration. Their transgression was manifested in more frequent and extreme forms than that of bears. Wolves would not just "*come down to the village*", like the bears rarely did, but they would actually "*enter in the middle of the village*". While the bears were perceived as odd, rare, and marginal trespassers, often limiting their wanderings at the outskirts of the village (crop fields, fruit plantations), wolves were seen to engage in the highest form of transgression by completely venturing inside the built-up and inhabited area of the village. A farmer from Fushë-Studa (Sh) stated that "*the bear would not enter the village; they might come close but not enter in between houses*". The wolves, he continued, would actually enter in the middle of the village, particularly during harsh winters, and even go inside livestock pens to snatch sheep. A wolf entering into the village was used as a common descriptor of wolf behaviour by many respondents. "*Nowadays, the wolves come down and even enter the village! A friend of mine has killed a wolf in the middle of the village, just two years ago. He had gone to hunt for hares and shot the wolf instead, right in the middle of the village!*" a hunter from Gojan village (Mu) stated.

It was this intrusion of wolves, which went well within human space, which represented a major problem in the judgement of locals. Several respondents expressed almost in disbelief, that wolves had started to approach and enter even larger towns and cities and not just villages.

Venturing inside a town or city was interpreted as an extremely daring form of intrusion. Two hunters from Puka (Mu) recounted with bewilderment a case where a pack of wolves had "*dared to enter in the middle of Kukës*" – a town of some 16,000 people in North-East Albania – "*last December and January*". This case received a lot of media attention at the time, with several local newspapers and televisions reporting on the occurrence (Top Channel 2012). A forester from Shkodra – the largest town of Northern Albania, with a population of some 100,000 people – claimed that wolves had started to approach his city, as cases of livestock attacks very near Shkodra, at the foothills of the mountains nearby, were reported to him not long ago. Furthermore, two foresters, respectively from Puka and Fushë-Arrëzi towns near Munella mountain, claimed that wolves were increasingly approaching their towns and other inhabited places. The forester from Fushë-Arrëz recalled a case in which wolves had killed the guarding dog of a petrol station in the town, expressing his amazement that wolves had become so daring to venture so well within built-up human environments.

Wolves did not limit their invasiveness to venturing inside inhabited settlements but go even further. Respondents often reported that wolves would engage in a more extreme form of intrusion by actually venturing into the living spaces of people; into their homes. Several respondents stated that wolves had even dared to enter "*inside houses*" of people in their region. As explained earlier, the border of a house in the discourse of local people was not just limited to the build structure of the home, but it extended to the border of the entire courtyard. Wolves transgressing into this space and going "inside the house" were seen and perceived as extreme malefactors. In the area of Shebenik, a frequently recurring story was that of a wolf (or a pack of wolves by some accounts) entering the home of a villager sometime at the beginning of the 20th century and killing all members of the family. The occurrence supposedly happened in the

village of Librazhd-Katund (or by some accounts in Gizavesh) and although respondents could not specify an exact period of time, the most common agreement was that it had happened before the Second World War. While the authenticity of the story remains hard to prove, as well as its exact mapping in terms of time and place, the majority of respondents from Shebenik appeared to have some knowledge of it and told similar variations of the story. The supposed transgression of the wolf by going "*inside the house*" seemed to have deeply influenced the local memory of the event, to the point that the story was being frequently told in the area to this day.

While discussing with a shepherd from Kodër-Spaç (Mu) he expressed being quite troubled by the fact that the wolf had killed his donkey "*next to the house*" and went on to state that wolves are a big problem because of this particular type of behaviour. Subsequent discussions with the same shepherd revealed that he had lost some 50 goats in recent years because of depredation by wolves, while grazing them in Munella Mountain and surrounding hilly areas. Nonetheless, he seemed to be more disconcerted with the particular attack on the donkey which happened next to the house, rather than the cumulative damage that wolves had done to his livestock while grazing in the mountains. The damage on goats was remarked by him as a fact of life in the mountains; once even stating: "*there are enough [goats] for me and for the wolf, Sandër*" while I accompanied him in one of the grazing trips in Munella. However, in the donkey's case, the shepherd claimed that he had to face off the wolf to avenge the donkey's death. This shepherd's problem with the wolf did not reside in the number of sheep killed or the sheer economic damage caused on livestock but in the transgression of what he considered his personal living space, his home; a transgression that the wolf had committed by coming inside and killing the donkey. This is not to say that the shepherd did not have a problem with

wolves killing his livestock up in the mountains – in fact he expressed his dislike of wolves on multiple occasions – but he seemed to accept more readily damages from wolves if they occurred in the mountains than by his house.

Two further accounts involving a horse and a donkey, respectively, point to the interconnected spatial and moral relationships between people and wolves. A forester from Gojan (Mu) recalled: "*A villager from here took his old horse – which he was not using anymore due to its age – up to the mountain. He tied its two front legs, so that the horse would not be able to run or go too far, and left it there for the wolves to kill and eat. When he went again up in the mountain after one month, he found the horse untouched and still alive. The horse had been staying there for a whole month and nothing had happened. In other cases, wolves would take the best horses without hesitation. I know this because many villagers bring very healthy horses which have been attacked and wounded by wolves, to my uncle, who is a veterinarian and cures them.*" The indication that the horse was 'offered' to the wolves by bringing it 'up in the mountains' offers an insight into the rightful spatial dimensions where the wolves should manifest their predatory behaviour according to local perceptions. A strikingly similar account was told by a shepherd from Pishkash (Sh): "[…] *there's a recent case, when a guy from Rrajca took an old donkey out for the wolves to eat. The place was teeming with wolves back then. To me personally, they were causing lots of damage as they were coming to my stani every two days and taking one sheep at a time. I also lost my dog on that year, so I had no protection. It is unbelievable! The wolves would not eat the donkey up in the pastures, but would come to my stani and take my sheep instead!*" Again, in this case, the wolf is offered a gift by people so that it can conduct its wolfish behaviour out in the pastures – the place that locals deemed such behaviour to be rightful – and not come to the *stani* – the temporary 'home' of shepherds

in the mountain. The shepherd further remarked that the wolf was also showing its intelligence through this behaviour, by saving the donkey as a 'reserve for later' and focusing on the shepherd's sheep instead.

The perception of the wolf as invader of human-created spaces included even temporary spaces in use by humans, such as the area that a grazing flock of sheep occupies. When describing attacks from wolves, several shepherds used the expression "*the wolf enters in the middle of the flock*". A strong emphasis was put on the fact that wolves would aim for going in the middle of the flock and not just snatching livestock from the edge, like, for instance, the bear was depicted in doing. The reiteration of this phrase explained an uncontained central attack which caused major havoc among sheep, not only by killing them in large numbers, but also by ruining the consistency and distribution of the flock and making sheep flee in terror in all directions. In this case, attacks from wolves were again contrasted with attacks from bears, with the latter usually being described as a more acceptable, well-behaved and contained form of attack. Bears, unlike wolves, would take sheep in a more 'cultured' fashion and in a non-intrusive way, by silently snatching only one of them from the edge of the flock and not by going in the middle of it. A shepherd from Letëm (Sh) stated: "*The bear comes slowly. You cannot sense the bear when it comes. It would take one [sheep] and leave. […] The wolf is more damaging. If the wolf enters in the middle of the flock, and if you do not have any dogs, they would cause significant damage. They would take 99 sheep and leave only one*". Another shepherd from Gur-Spaç (Mu) was quite specific in differentiating attacks from bears and wolves. As I commented earlier, he claimed to have personally lost one goat to the bear a few days prior to our conversation and, even though he had not seen the perpetrating predator, he was convinced that the goat had been taken by a bear instead of a wolf: *"If it would have been*

a wolf [taking the goat], there would have been signs. Wolves would bite one goat here, throw another one on the ground there, it would be a mess! All the goats would get scared and jump like crazy! Whereas the bear can take a goat without scaring [the whole flock]. They take one and bury it for later. The fact is that, there were no ravens flying at all on that day. This means that the bear had buried the goat." Here, the bear was clearly differentiated from the wolf, by being more discreet and well-behaved in its ways of taking livestock, by initially snatching one without creating havoc and later, by burying it.

These claims indicate that strong emphasis is put on the perception that the wolf is not damaging just for the mere fact of killing livestock, but also because it has the initiative to enter and put itself in the centre of the grazing livestock. The flock and its boundaries represent a temporarily-created human space in the mountain. A space created by the shepherd through careful flocking, guiding and guarding livestock up in the pastures. By going in the middle of the flock, the wolf does not only cause damage to the shepherd; it also destroys 'the order' and the space that the shepherd had created for livestock. Thus, wolves are not only blamed for killing livestock, something which bears also occasionally do, but also, and primarily, for the way how they infiltrate and invade an entire flock.

4.3. The mythical (non)existence of lynx

As the majority of respondents had no knowledge of the existence of lynx as an animal, it was very difficult to map local perceptions of lynx territoriality. Information on lynx was often given as a third-party experience as most respondents who claimed to know the species had heard of it through stories from other people in the village, usually from elderly hunters and

shepherds. Because most information on lynx usually came from the older generation, they were often presumed to be extinct or, at most, very rare by younger people who had heard of them. This general lack of knowledge, combined with lack of interactions with the species were the likely reasons that had given rise to the perception of lynx as an animal that lives in the most remote areas of the mountains or forests, and as far as possible from villages. This was, in many ways, similar to perceptions on bears' territoriality. However, whilst bears would occasionally venture near villages, lynx were thought not to approach villages whatsoever and were strictly perceived as 'animals of the mountain'. A hunter from Qarrishta (Sh) claimed: "*[…] the lynx stay away. […] They don't come close to the village. […] If a lynx is up in Miraka Mountain, it would stay there; it won't come down to the village*". Lynx were considered creatures that live and exist in complete avoidance of people, thus the areas where they lived were also considered the wildest and remotest: "*I would say that the lynx is one of the wildest animals, and when I say wild, I mean wild by character and not towards people, as it is very cunning and smart and can avoid humans. It needs tranquillity to survive. It stays away from rural areas and is difficult to spot. It is a secretive animal and very agile.*" stated a forester from Shkodra. Another forester from Mërtur (Mu) claimed that the best luck one can have, is to come 1000 metres close to a lynx, because any closer than that, the lynx would have long sensed humans and moved away to avoid them. Foresters were, in general, the respondents who were able to give more information on the territoriality of lynx, however, as several of them admitted, this was mainly coming from literature rather than experience in the field. Some of them stated of knowing from publications that lynx are territorial animals with fixed home ranges in the mountains, and that they do not migrate or move away from their areas. Generally, most reactions on lynx territoriality by other respondents were characterised

by uncertainty and lack of knowledge, with many being quite puzzled on this aspect of lynx's life.

The construction of lynx's image as a creature of the wild and remote, which lived and dwelled very far away from villages and avoided any form of contact with people, partly explains the widespread perception that lynx were not seen as a threat to livestock and human livelihoods in both study areas. As there was no overlap of places where lynx lived with places where humans lived, damages from them were considered almost impossible to occur. In addition, as discussed in Chapter 3, many respondents even questioned the ability of lynx to kill livestock at all, as they were largely perceived to feed exclusively on smaller animals such as hares, mice and birds.

Interestingly, even though the perception of lynx territoriality was, in many ways, similar to that of bears, as creatures that live exclusively on the mountain or in the forests, respondents never referred to these places as 'the home of the lynx' like as it commonly was for bears. Again, the lynx's rarity, elusiveness and lack of interactions with people seem to play an important role here. As the majority of people did not have personal experiences with lynx and had, at best, heard about the animal from other people, their constructed image of lynx, as a creature of the remote, was a representation of this lack of knowledge rather than an observed and lived experience. The lynx lived in the remote not because its home was perceived to be there, such as in the case of bears, but because the remote was the only explicable and possible place for them to be, given that, they were almost never seen nor heard of.

Respondents who stated knowing what lynx were and had at least some marginal forms of interaction with them, often portrayed lynx presence in the mountains under a mystical veil. As shown in Chapter 3, one of the most prominent myths around the animal was their ability

to outcompete and eradicate wolves. Given this, most respondents, and in particular shepherds, believed that lynx presence was actually beneficial for their areas given that they would keep wolves out, if the latter were to venture inside of a lynx area. Several *stani* shepherds commented that it was because of lynx presence around their *stani*-s that the wolves were absent or very rare. Given this idea, presence of lynx was believed to bring positive consequences for stockbreeding, as they minimised the risk of potential attacks from wolves. "*Because lynx are present around my stani, wolves are very rare,*" stated one of the most experienced shepherds in Kusar (Sh). This widespread belief of lynx as an animal that solves the 'wolf-problem' was prevalent among respondents, making lynx presence actually desired by most locals. The lynx, when presumed present in an area, would be vested with a disciplinary role, with the purpose to restore order in the mountain areas by eradicating wolves and therefore their vagabond behaviour. One forester from Dorëz (Sh) commented that because lynx were present in the higher altitudes of Shebenik, wolves had started to venture in lower altitudes and closer to villages, thus causing damage to people in these areas: "*In all the areas up there (in Shebenik) where lynx live, there are no wolves, or they are very rare. One has to be more alert of the wolves down here in [the villages of] Librazhd-Katund, Gizavesh, Gorrejë… more than up in mountains, where the lynx is.*" Here, while order seemed to have been put up in the mountains due to presence of lynx, the problem of wolves had been transferred to the lowlands.

In such locally perceived territorial competitions between lynx and wolves, the lynx would come out as a cryptic 'mountain gentrifier', which would outcast or deter wolves from highlands and forests and place a desired 'order' in these areas. Lynx were seen to transform the mountain from a potentially risky place for livestock to graze due to widespread presence

of wolves, into areas where shepherds could tranquilly keep and graze their sheep without fearing wolf attacks. The displacement of vagabond wolves, opened space for shepherds, people from the village, to move in and do their business. As lynx themselves were perceived to not pose a threat to livestock (Chapters 2 and 3), their presence in the mountain was believed to bring only benefits to shepherds and no negative consequences were vested to the animal.

This role of lynx as a 'wolf-controller' was not only limited to benefits on livestock but was sometimes extended onto a wider 'gamekeeper' role. Many participants remarked that having lynx was a sign of good and healthy forests and ecosystems in general and healthy wildlife populations in particular. Foresters, especially, often used the presence of lynx as an indicator of healthy and functioning natural systems and as an agent that ensured equilibrium among wildlife, particularly by annihilating the negative effects of wolves. As wolves were often labelled as "*the enemy of all animals*", with no distinction between wild or domestic animals, the lynx's ability to outcast and deter them were beneficial for livestock and wild animals alike. One forester from Shkodra remarked: "*I think that there is a positive impact [of having lynx in the area], as it regulates the relationship between prey and other predatory animals as well. For example, the lynx will not allow a disproportional increase of wolves at the expense of chamois... and the lynx acts as a balancer in this regard... it keeps the equilibrium between the animals.*" Presence of lynx, and their abilities to control wolves, were therefore, not only seen as beneficial in creating livestock-friendly landscapes, but also in creating more balanced natural landscapes in general, in which wolves, and their detrimental effects on either domestic or wild animals, were controlled and contained.

4.4. Cultural home ranges of (Albanian) carnivores

Analysing the above material on the spatial relationships between people and predators in Albania, suggests that local perceptions of damages from large carnivores and subsequent reactions to them are in great part dependent on the local construction of human and predator space and place. In cases when damages occur inside or at the borders of delineated human spaces, such as villages, agricultural fields and most importantly houses, they are interpreted as unacceptable and responded to through retaliatory measures by locals. Predators are considered as intruders in human space and property and this triggers a series of actions, analogous to actions taken in response to human intruders according to local customary rules, which I will discuss below. On the other hand, if damages occur inside areas which are considered and perceived to belong to predators, such as in the mountains, forests or highland pastures, they are largely tolerated and more readily accepted by locals. In this case, the locals interpret themselves as being 'intruders' into a space that belongs to the predators and damages are accepted according to customary rules, an analogy of the punishment they would receive for intruding into another person's space.

Villagers in Munella and Shebenik, much like in the rest of mountainous rural Albania, centre their familial and social organisation around customary codes based on honour, trust and property (de Waal 2005). Such codes have been the subject of extensive anthropological, legal and social studies by various researchers worldwide (Hasluck 1954, Sadiku 2014, Schwandner-Sievers 2001). They are commonly known under the name of *Kanun*, the most prominent of which is the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, mainly effective in areas of northern Albania. The Kanun is purported to have been named as such in reference to the 15th century Albanian nobleman, Lekë Dukagjini, who allegedly was the first one to develop and codify the existing

customary laws at the time under the format and name of the Kanun. However there is very scant evidence for this (Trnavci 2008). Other variations of the *Kanun*, dubbed as the Kanun of Labëria (prevalently in south Albania), Kanun of Çermenika (eastern Albania), Kanun of Papa Zhuli and others have been exerted in different mountainous regions of Albania, however the set of rules and norms outlined in each of them remains substantially similar. There is no clear estimation for the exact period when these codes emerged, however it is largely accepted that they have been developed over centuries in the mountainous regions of Albania and might have been influenced by different law regimes existing in medieval times (Mangalakova 2004, Trnavci 2008). The Kanun was maintained and transmitted only as an oral account for centuries, and it wasn't until the early 20th century that Shtjefën Gjeçovi, a catholic priest from northern Albania, collected, structured, and wrote these accounts into the version that came to be known as the published format of the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini (Kastrati 1955).

The point here is not to discuss the implementation of norms and codes outlined in the Kanun in current times and in the two study areas, as this is beyond the purposes of this study (for this see(Mangalakova 2004, Schwandner-Sievers 2001) but to see whether these norms and codes have relational links with the way how local people construct and respond to the different large carnivores in Albania. As a matter of fact, none of the respondents I spoke to made any reference to the Kanun when talking about their day to day lives in the village or in the *stani*, unless I would explicitly ask about it or any parts of it throughout conversations. The Kanun is simply taken as an existing account that summarises the cultural, moral and social principles based on which rural mountainous societies and individuals function and regulate themselves. I re-stress that respondents almost never referred to the Kanun itself speaking of rules and

norms; however, the observed manifestation of these rules largely fitted with what is currently known from the written legacies of the Kanun.

Customary norms and codes outlined in the Kanun are largely intended for preserving the integrity of the individual, of the family and extended kin group, as well as their property. More generally they aim at regulating social and economic aspects of village life. Important components are regulations on the management of the house, livestock and property as well as the respective punishments and fines imposed to outsiders and evildoers that cause damage to any of these. The definition of a house and its borders is crucial in this analysis as the relational processes with strangers are built upon it. The code outlines that a house can be considered any structure that is sufficient in size to have a "*stone of a hearth which produces smoke*[3]" and it includes any other building found in the courtyard, "*since it is in its shadow*". This implies that the border of a house is, essentially, its courtyard border, which is marked by a physical fence or wall and includes all the built-up structures within, such as the home building, silo, dog kennels, pens, beehives and milk storage area. If an outsider wishes to enter the house they may call from outside the courtyard and wait to be invited in, alternatively if no response comes from the house, they should "*leave, and mind their own business*" (Gjeçovi & Fox 1989). Any person who violates the border of the house and enters without calling the owner with intentions to plunder or steal something is considered an evildoer and a fine is imposed upon him[4]. Furthermore, the violation of a house is not interpreted only in terms of property damage but also as moral damage to the owner. The preservation of honour is a strong component of

[3] 'Production of smoke' implies that the house is inhabited.

[4] The masculine references *'he* and *him'* are given here as such due to their use throughout the texts of the code.

the Kanun. Unlike property damage, whose retribution could be done through means of paying a fine, offenses to honour are never forgiven, and honour can be restored only through the "*spilling of blood*" as quoted in the Kanun. The "*person dishonoured has every right to avenge his honour*" through his own initiative. Violations of the house or its components are considered as one of several types of offenses to the honour of a man: "*A man is dishonoured: […] If someone breaks into his house, his sheepfold, his silo, or his milk-shed in his courtyard*" (Gjeçovi & Fox 1989). In such cases, the killing of the evildoer would be required to restore the man's honour.

These norms, intended to regulate processes of integrating outsiders and strangers into the house and punishing offenders who do not comply with them, have clear applications in the relational processes between people and large carnivores in the two study areas. Territoriality, space, belonging and transgressions of the different species of large carnivores seem to be largely interpreted from customary rules and codes that also govern and guide these aspects of people's lives and relationships between people.

Bears are largely referred to and constructed in human terms, as creatures that "have a house", a fixed place of belonging which is in the mountains and in the forests. The bilateral spatial relationship between human and bears is a representation of the spatial relationship that exists also between people that have fixed places of living and belonging which they call homes. In the bear's case, the mountain (or the forest) is a space analogous to the house and home of people in the village. Bears are treated and responded to with respect because they have a home, and the same type of response and treatment is expected by them towards people. Any infringement of this spatial relationship seems to comply with the local customary codes of territoriality and property and is dealt accordingly. Shepherds who take their livestock to graze

up in the mountains, in the perceived home of the bear, showed a great sense of awareness that they were trespassing into the bear's home by doing this. Since shepherds had not respected the perceived borders of the bear's house and had not followed rules of getting integrated into it, bear attacks on their livestock were interpreted as the bear's retribution for this infringement and consequently accepted as a rightful form of punishment. Similarly, bears that leave their home up in the mountain and come down to villages to feed on crops and fruit trees were perceived as violators that transgress into the boundaries of a house. Subsequently, retribution measures by the owner of the house against the individual bear ought to be taken to restore the material and moral damage done to the house and its owner. Perceptions on the fixed 'home' territoriality and individuality of bears contributed to their treatment as fellow-humans by locals in Munella and Shebenik. Therefore, any wrongdoings by bears were not attributed to the entire bear population, but to the individual, single, bear who committed them much like the wrongdoings of fellow humans are not considered an attribute of the entire human population but manifestations of a single badly-behaving human individual instead.

Acting in terms of, and applying, customary rules on territory and property were noted also in multiple local accounts on the phenomenon of shifting territorialities between bears and humans. As demonstrated earlier, several respondents reported knowing cases of bears that venture into abandoned villages, and even make shelter into abandoned houses or other man-made structures. Since people had moved out of these places for a long time, bears moving in and appropriating them was perceived to be an acceptable and normal phenomenon. Territory transfer regulations can be found in the historic codes of Kanun: "*If someone leaves his dwelling for ten years, he loses its ownership and it belongs to the first person who takes it.*" However, it is to be noted that these rule has been found to be valid only for the region of

Mirdita (Hasluck 1954) and in general, territorial property is considered non-transferable according to customary laws of highland Albania and remains the property of the owner (and its descendants), even if they move out of the area for indefinite periods of time. Concomitantly, it was mostly respondents in Munella (located at the geographical centre of the historic Mirdita region) who described the appropriation of abandoned houses by bears as an expected phenomenon following a long-term leaving of the original owners.

Contrary to bears, wolves were referred to and constructed as vagabond creatures which "*do not have a house*" and which continuously wander landscapes in search for food. The perception that wolves could not be pinned down to a territory seemed to be at the core of their portrayal as problematic creatures. Their continuous and uncontrolled movements were carried out with disregard of human-set boundaries, as wolves frequently transgressed them. Wolves would violate human areas to the extreme by daring to do what most other wild animals would not do; to enter into the middle of human settlements (villages, towns) and even to enter people's houses with intentions to steal and plunder. Consequently, wolves were commonly depicted as thieves, dishonourable and disrespectful creatures. In addition, unlike bears, this wrong behaviour from wolves was not attributed to a single individual but to the entire species, given that the wolf population was not considered a set of single individuals, but a mass, a crowd where all individuals mixed together and did not divide territories either between themselves or with people. There was no single vagabond, thief and dishonourable wolf, they were all vagabonds, thieves and dishonourable.

Wolves were the predator for which, historical cultural codes of Albania seem to find a great application in the relationship that people build with them. Wolves are perceived to contravene the most local rules on territoriality and property. In essence, these very contraventions,

perceived as problematic by people, demonstrate that the code between people and wolves exists and is applied to this relationship. As in the cases of misbehaving bears, local customary rules guarantee a set of actions and measures to be taken by people in case of territorial and property infringements from wolves. A wolf intruding into a person's house, was interpreted as an infringement of property and honour, in resounding analogy to human malefactors doing the same. Consequently, retribution actions that followed, characterised by punishment and revenge, were based on the same principles as well.

Nonetheless, respondents clearly showed that in spite of their perception of wolves as homeless and vagabond creatures, that they were more willing to accept the wolves' behaviour in areas where they deemed that behaviour to be normal; in mountains and forests, which were not seen as territories that belong to people. Tolerance towards attacks was highly dependent on the place where these attacks occurred. While depredation on livestock grazing up in the mountains seemed to be more accepted and tolerated, killing of domestic animals inside or near the borders of a house was highly condemned and punished. In these cases, people reacted according to customary codes on territory infringement; where in the first case, they considered themselves as trespassers into territories which are not theirs (and consequently accept livestock damages as a form of punishment) and in the second case they considered the wolf as a trespasser that needs to be punished.

The cases of locals 'offering' domestic animals to wolves, by bringing and leaving them unattended up in the mountains, could be interpreted as attempts to communicate to wolves about the rightful place where they can manifest their wolfish behaviour. Locals did not seem to have a problem with the wolfish behaviour *per se*, but rather more with the place where this behaviour was being manifested. Wolves were allowed to be wolves high up in the mountains,

forests and pastures, however they would become criminals by coming inside villages and people's houses.

Of all three large carnivores, lynx stand out as the ones that were the least related to local codes on territoriality. This seems to be the case largely because they were unknown, perceived to be non-existent or, at best, very rare. The mountain was designated as their territory, not because respondents believed that it was their home, but because it represented the only explicable place where these creatures, hardly seen by people, could possibly live. This unfamiliarity and lack of experiences with lynx made them animals that stay outside of human domains and concerns. With lynx, it could be inferred that local codes on territoriality do not apply simply because there is no one to apply them to, or if there are, they are permanently out of human areas and therefore out of human concerns for territory division. Nonetheless, lack of experiences had not halted the rise of myths around lynx among people who claimed to know them. The most common of these was the perception that lynx could outcompete and deter wolves from the territories they would occupy. This belief made them highly favoured animals, particularly among highland shepherds who had concerns about wolves attacking their livestock. Lynx were brought in the mountains as desired creatures that can permanently solve problems from wolves.

4.5. Concluding remarks

The perceived spatial relationships between people and predators discussed in this chapter highlight some important aspects with regard to the local constructions of large predators and interrelationships with people. The ways in which local people relate to, and interact with, each

species in spatial terms indicates that these predators are largely constructed as social actors, with roles and behavioural expectations placed upon them. This is, in many ways, analogous to the roles and behavioural expectations that people in highland Albania place on each-other, and on other human groups and individuals. Among all three large carnivores, bears were the closest to being considered as fellow locals; they were constructed, and responded to, as house owners, as gentlemen that have a place of belonging. The behavioural expectations from bears were similar to those expected from other house owners in rural areas, and if any diverged from the norm they were punished according to customary rules that regulate relationships between people. Wolves, on the other hand, were largely considered, and responded to, as homeless others; wanderers without a place of belonging that move from one area to the other and take what they can without much consideration of a person's home or property. As such the discourse around wolves was, in many ways, reminiscent of discourses, with discriminatory overtones, used for groups of homeless people, or groups of people with nomadic and unsettled ways of life, such as the Romani people in Albania (De Soto et al. 2005). Therefore, damages caused by wolves were further amplified as problems because locals viewed them as happening primarily because of the way of life of wolves and their lack of a 'fixed' home. Damages from wolves were not 'oddities', something abnormal, as they were with bears, but 'expected occurrences' that were bound to happen because of the perceived way of life of wolves.

Finally, lynx seem to be socially constructed as outsiders and strangers. Customary and social norms do not seem to apply to interrelationships between people and lynx, mostly because it is not possible to apply norms to someone that is not considered as part of the social group or not even considered to be there at all. The image of lynx as strangers seems to contribute to the unusual beliefs that are attributed to them and their abilities. Lynx, as outsiders to the local

group composed of different social actors (humans, bears and wolves), are able to perform actions and functions that hardly anyone else can do, such as completely ridding their territories of wolves.

The perceived spatial relationships between people and predators in highland Albania might have some direct implications for the conservation of these species. They can provide useful insights for carnivore damage mitigation and compensation measures. Since locals seem to judge the severity of damages from large carnivores from spatial and moral perspectives, potential measures undertaken by conservationists for damage mitigation and compensation should consider these perspectives seriously. In addition, they can bring useful insights for large carnivore management approaches based on principles of zoning (Linnell et al. 2005a). Conservationists and managers who are responsible for outlining and planning zones and areas that have varying degrees of large carnivore presence and abundance, with the purpose of reducing conflict and increasing acceptance, could greatly benefit from local perceptions of the spatial belonging of large carnivores. Aligning the process of zoning definitions with local perceptions of 'large carnivore areas' could decrease the potential for conflict generation and improve coexistence between people and predators.

5. Where is all the conflict? Interplays of material and moral damages from large carnivores in highland Albania.

Recent literature focusing on 'human-wildlife conflicts' have deconstructed the latter into human-human conflicts and human-wildlife impacts (Redpath et al. 2013, Young et al. 2010). This partitioning has provided a major advancement in understanding and managing conservation conflicts, in particular conflicts with, or over, large carnivores (Linnell 2013). In this chapter, I re-visit the material notion of human-large carnivore conflict (i.e. impacts) as actual situations in which predators and humans have adverse effects on each-other (Conover 2001) in a landscape setting where predators and people have always co-existed alongside each-other. I show that impacts experienced by large carnivores generate complex and diverse reactions within the local population, depending on the place where they occur and after being filtered through social and moral codes, which are, primarily, applicable to humans. Subsequently, I argue that failure to recognise and incorporate local diversity and complexity of impacts into efforts to conserve and manage large carnivores can quickly lead to the creation and escalation of human-human conflicts (*sensu* (Madden 2004) even in contexts where such conflicts are originally absent. By focusing on the impact-side of problems from carnivores in an almost 'conservation-free' context, I argue that even the generic use of terms like 'impacts', 'damages' and other similar ones used to describe adverse effects from large carnivores on human economies, are often limiting with regard to the complex interpretations local people have about these situations. Simplified definitions of 'impacts', focusing solely on material aspects of damage from large carnivores, do little to abolish presuppositions of large carnivores

as animals that exist in a perpetual antagonistic situation with humans (Peterson et al. 2010). The research work presented herein, amply indicates that impacts from large carnivores are not perceived as perpetually and unequivocally problematic to people that share environments with them. The interpretation of physical damages from large carnivores on human properties as problems (i.e. situations that require solutions) is dependent on the spatial (discussed in Chapter 4) and moral dimension of damage and their (non)compliance with local customary codes applicable to people in Albanian highland communities.

I show that while negative impacts of large carnivores on local economies and livelihoods are widespread and recurring, they are not always experienced, considered or even manifested as being problematic by local people. Perceptions of damages have a multifaceted dimension that goes beyond a simple understanding of 'material damage' and they are crucial in maintaining co-existence and tolerance between people and predators in highland Albania.

5.1. Dividing 'conflict' from 'impact'

Based on the predatory nature of large carnivores and the damages they cause, their relationships with people are largely portrayed in literature as one that has conflict at its centre (Sillero-Zubiri & Laurenson 2001, Treves & Karanth 2003, Woodroffe et al. 2005). There are an ever-increasing number of studies that explore these conflictive relationships. Moreover, many conservation projects and initiatives worldwide aimed at preserving large carnivore populations often have a strong focus on conflicts with the assumption that tackling and ameliorating these conflicts will largely benefit the conservation of predators (Madden 2004, Redpath et al. 2013). The existence of conflicts is a central presupposition in such projects and

considerable resources, both financial and human, are allocated to alleviate, reduce and manage them. Governmental institutions responsible for wildlife management and conservation often implement compensation schemes and programmes intending to lessen the financial impact of carnivores and increase their acceptance among members of affected communities (Swenson & Andren 2005). For the same reasons, designated state agencies and hunting associations often embark on predator control and culling programmes, hoping that the reduction of numbers of predators through hunting would lessen conflicts and increase local acceptance of predators (Treves 2009).

As large predators have large extensive requirements and occur in low numbers it becomes almost impossible to secure their long term preservation only within natural reserves and protected areas away from human influence (Woodroffe & Ginsberg 1998). This is particularly evident in the European continent, where wilderness areas without any degree of human influence are virtually absent and large predators have to survive in landscapes that are largely used or influenced to various degrees by people (Chapron et al. 2014, Linnell et al. 2001, Santini et al. 2016). In much of western and central Europe, large carnivores were exterminated during the 19th and early 20th century, due to human persecution, loss of prey species and habitat destruction (Breitenmoser 1998). With the emergence of environmental movements and world-wide increases in environmental awareness starting from the mid-20th century, attitudes and policies towards large predators changed from predominately favouring persecution and extermination to protection and management throughout most of their ranges. Furthermore, recovery of forests and wild prey helped the reappearance of large predators in areas where they had long been extinct. Re-introduction programmes, particularly for Eurasian lynx and brown bears, have also played an important role in the comeback of these species in

many central and western European countries (Linnell et al. 2009). It is currently estimated that continental Europe (without Russia) has twice as many wolves compared to contiguous United States, despite being only half the size and having twice the human population density of the US (Chapron et al. 2014, Kaczensky et al. 2013). This has been lauded as a successful comeback, particularly considering that it has happened in landscapes that have been markedly altered by humans over centuries and are densely inhabited by people. This 'co-existence model' provides a stark contrast with the 'wilderness model' of conservation largely seen in North America and many African countries that seek to separate large carnivores from humans by restricting them to natural parks and reserves, often even by physically fencing off the latter (Packer et al. 2013).

This recovery, however, has not come without consequences. While large carnivore reappearance in many Central and Western European countries has been welcomed by conservation communities, environmentalist groups and most of the general public, strong opposition has risen among other groups, most prominently farmers, livestock breeders and hunters who are, unsurprisingly, the people who face the most consequences from the increased presence of large carnivores in their areas (Enserink & Vogel 2006). Cases of large carnivores re-appearing in areas where they had not occurred for centuries have sparked considerable public interest and often resulted in clashes between different groups of people, over the rights of these animals to remain and establish in these areas. These clashes sometimes escalate into conflicts of greater proportions. Occasions where organised local communities ask for total eradication of re-established carnivores or show a strong and threatening opposition towards re-introduction initiatives are not unfamiliar throughout the European continent. The recent re-appearance of wolves in Germany and France has been faced with major opposition from

members of farming and hunting communities. In some instances, conflict situations have reached wide and far, such as the case of a collective plea of farmers and agricultural scientists for the total removal of wolves from the French landscape due to the threat posed to rural livelihoods and maintenance of grazing landscapes in France and even death threats to local authorities in south-western France because of the support given to a brown bear re-introduction programme in the Pyrenees (Buller 2008, Liberation 2014, Smith 2009).

Moreover, many conflict situations worldwide occur around conservation areas and national parks where a 'wilderness model' of excluding people from protected areas is promoted. This model, referred to as 'fortress conservation', promotes the conservation of natural habitats in complete avoidance of people, contrary to the co-existence model outlined above. To achieve this, in many situations, large tracts of land are either 'emptied' of native human populations or locals living in the vicinity of these areas are denied access, often without much consideration of the social implications arising from this approach (Saberwal 2003). Large carnivores often play the role of flagship species in such models. Their charismatic status worldwide is used to promote the creation of nature reserves and national parks by superimposing and oppressing the needs of local people. Problems with large carnivores in these cases are often the result of clashes between locals residing in the vicinity of protected areas and authorities or other groups that strive to preserve these areas. Hence, damages experienced by locals from large carnivores are associated with feelings of marginalisation, oppression and exclusion, by institutions and other interest groups that prioritise the preservation of these areas over the concerns of local people and their livelihoods (Kabra 2009, Lunstrum 2016).

In both cases (i.e. recent re-establishment of large predators or human exclusion from protected areas), conflicts with, or over, large carnivores become central to the definition of human-large carnivore relationships in general. However, as various authors have suggested (Linnell 2013, Madden 2004, Redpath et al. 2013, Young et al. 2010), the so called 'human-large carnivore conflicts' in these cases have very little to do with actual instances of damage and the animals themselves but are instead manifestations of the larger and underlying conflicts between the different groups of people who hold different values and views in respect to these animals and their presence in the environment. Young et al. (2010) and Redpath et al. (2015) have argued that the application of the term 'human-wildlife conflict' for such instances is detrimental to the broader relationships that people have with animals and have suggested dividing it into 'human-wildlife impacts' (i.e. direct damages that wildlife has on human activities and livelihoods) and 'human-human conflicts' (i.e. clashes between people adopting pro-wildlife positions and others adopting other positions). What is often dubbed as 'human-wildlife conflict' in the literature, is in reality a 'human-human conflict' (Redpath et al. 2015).

Anthropologists and social scientists have long suggested that impacts from large carnivores in areas where they reappear after a long-term absence often escalate to manifest formerly hidden and underlying larger conflicts between different groups of the society. This is typically between minorities who feel marginalised and oppressed and have to carry the costs of having large carnivores nearby and ruling majorities who promote large carnivore conservation, but are quite detached from the physical environments where these animals live (Krange & Skogen 2011, Moore 1994). As such, conflicts with, or over, large carnivores become clashes of values and symbolism vested in the animals, which can be far greater than the physical damages the animals cause and most often are quite distanced with these damages.

While these expressions of conflict are prominent in countries of Central and Western Europe where large carnivores have recently reappeared, the picture is quite different in the eastern part of the continent. In much of Eastern Europe, large carnivores have managed to survive and live alongside people for centuries and have never been totally eradicated (Chapron et al. 2014). It seems that this long-term presence alongside each other has created tolerance mechanisms and strategies that have helped the adaptation of local populations to the presence of large carnivores and made co-existence possible (Carter & Linnell 2016). A likely explanation to this resides in livestock husbandry methods and stockbreeding development. Many countries in Eastern Europe have largely preserved traditional livestock husbandry and flock protection measures, such as the use of livestock guarding dogs, presence of shepherds during grazing and penning of animals at night (Gehring et al. 2010, Kaczensky 1999, Lescureux et al. 2014). By contrast, in most of Western Europe, the extirpation of large carnivores in the past and stockbreeding intensification for mass production has largely resulted in abandonment of traditional and conventional measures for flock protection (Kaczensky 1999).

There is, however, comparatively very little research on conflicts and interactions in countries with long term co-existence between people and predators. In general, most of the analytical thinking on human-large carnivore conflicts and relationships in Europe comes from countries where large carnivores have recently re-established, are reappearing or are subject to reintroduction programmes. While the majority of the general public seems to be supportive of this comeback, other groups of people, such as stockbreeders, hunters and farmers, directly affected by large carnivores, strongly oppose it, mostly because they have long lost the

adaptations and willingness to cope with predators. A further problem in exploring human-large carnivore relationships is that most studies focusing on people's perceptions of, and relationships with, carnivores have been quantitative in nature and oriented towards specific factors that define this relationship with conflicts assumed to be central factors in these explorations. Such quantitative approaches provide valuable insights on the extent and diversity of human-large carnivore conflicts, but they risk missing the complexity of relationships that exist between local people and carnivores, as well as failing to put these relationships into larger contexts of local livelihoods. Qualitative approaches, deriving from social sciences and humanities, can provide the means for grasping this complexity, as well as to help inform the reasons why and how conflicts develop at the local level. Such understanding can be helpful in improving conservation and management approaches for large carnivores and ameliorating existing conflicts or their possible escalation in the future.

Considering the above, the research presented here provides useful insights related to the perception of damages from large carnivores in two directions not frequently covered by existing research on human-wildlife conflicts. Firstly, it offers an opportunity to look at damages from large carnivores in a long-term co-existence context, since humans and large carnivores have always persisted alongside each other in highland Albania and convivial methods have been developed and maintained over time. Secondly, it allows for an examination of damage interpretations in a 'conservation-free' context, where locals have been largely left – either by institutional incompetence and weakness, or lack of prioritisation of nature conservation issues – to deal with large carnivores by themselves without much outside influence from agencies and groups promoting conservation. It can be argued that highland Albania currently represents a 'blank-paper' in terms of conservation history and actuality, and

gives the possibility to look at people's representation of impacts from large carnivores before the onset and strengthening of the conservation movement. These views on impacts are, arguably, more detached from emotionally-charged views of impacts in places where large carnivores have only recently reappeared, such as central and western Europe, and places where outside conservation actors strongly exert their power in support of the conservation of large carnivores.

The re-articulation and division of the classic definition 'human-wildlife conflicts' into 'human-wildlife impacts' and 'human-human conflicts', as suggested by various scholars working on conservation conflicts (Madden 2004, Peterson et al. 2010, Redpath et al. 2013, Young et al. 2010), constitutes a positive step forward in our understanding of relationships with large carnivores and provides better grounds for addressing and mitigating issues with, or over large carnivores. It has become increasingly clear that the majority of cases branded as human-wildlife conflicts are, in fact, conflicts between groups of people who prioritise conservation objectives and groups of people who prioritise other objectives, usually about livelihoods and development (Redpath et al., 2015). A multitude of cases addressed and referred to as human-wildlife conflicts are, in essence, human-human conflicts. While this differentiation between human-wildlife impacts and human-human conflicts might seem unimportant to some or just a matter of semantics, it has important ramifications in the way conservation conflicts are viewed and tackled, primarily by extending the responsibility to deal with them beyond conservation biologists, and integrating other important parties, skilled in social and cultural dimensions of conflicts. In addition, it recognises that animals are not conscious antagonists with humans in this relationship but rather more symbols of underlying

conflicts between different groups of people holding different interests over them (Peterson et al. 2010).

These recent developments in our understanding of conservation conflicts over large carnivores have shifted much analytical thinking away from the 'impact' side of the problem to the 'human-human' side of it. Various disciplines in social sciences and humanities have stepped in to explore the complex nature and dynamics of human-human conflicts, something that is beyond the grasp of ecology and conservation biology, as classic disciplines that have dealt with human-large carnivores conflicts in the past. This interest seems logical, as the most acute conflicts over large carnivores are manifestations of social conflicts and issues between different groups of people, whereas the actual physical damages that large carnivores cause are left in the domain of natural sciences, for disciplines like biology or veterinary science to deal with. It would seem trivial for humanities and social sciences, to focus on actual physical impacts from large carnivores. Patterns of foxes killing chicken or numbers of sheep killed seasonally by wolves, could be documented, summarised and analysed quantitatively and spatially through statistics and mathematical models. Such 'impacts' or 'damages' have, at first sight, nothing to offer for the social dimension of conflicts as they are considered to represent just the material and economic side of it (Linnell 2013). While this is most certainly true, defining impacts or damages from large carnivores under this simplistic approach might be misleading and limiting to what these instances might really mean to the people who experience them. An insightful look into how local people, who have to deal with large carnivores on a frequent basis, construct, interpret and respond to these impacts, reveals that they can be complex, diverse and meriting further attention from a social and cultural point of view. I shall seek to deconstruct perceptions on impacts from large carnivores in the following

sections by making use of my ethnographic work in Munella and Shebenik mountain regions and through consideration of the cultural context in which these damages occur.

5.2. The quest for finding large carnivore damages in Albania

"*Më mirë syri, se sa nami*" – Albanian proverb

(Better to lose an eye, than your reputation)

While conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Munella and Shebenik, my initial perception on damages from large carnivores was that they did not seem to represent a major concern in the daily lives of locals. I shaped this perception throughout my fieldwork, given that numerous discussions with villagers seemed to point out that material damages from predators were nothing extraordinary, but events that are bound to happen if one lives and works in close proximity to these animals. There were, of course, individual variations to this pattern, with respondents showing different levels of damage perception in between, but the wider popular opinion seemed to indicate that large carnivore damages were not among the major worries of villagers' livelihoods in highland Albania. On a more general scale, it can be argued that problems caused by large carnivores were almost negligible, especially when considering the grand scale of issues local people living in these mountainous regions were facing. People's main worries about their livelihoods were related to rural abandonment, poverty, infrastructure and institutional issues (lack of roads, schools, medical centres, etc.) and marginalisation by central and local authorities. Even among professional shepherds, as one of the groups of people who, presumably, have higher motivations and reasons to perceive and treat large

carnivores as a major threat to their livelihoods, predators seemed a minor problem – if a problem at all – in their daily work and activities. Instead, major worries for shepherds seemed to be related to lack of proper veterinary care by the state, lack of subsidises, abandonment of the profession by young people, market insecurities and other similar issues threatening their way of life. Unless I specifically asked about issues with large carnivores, respondents would not engage or bring up in discussions those issues themselves. An important observation was that no respondent whatsoever came close to describing or defining damages caused by large carnivores as 'conflict' situations with them. The word 'conflict' was never mentioned by any participant during conversations concerning large carnivores and issues coming from them. Interestingly, the word 'conflict' was used at times when describing and discussing antagonistic situations between two or more people over natural resources, such as, for instance, conflict over the use of water for irrigation, forest use for firewood, or even game hunting. Impacts from large carnivores seemed to be, at the time, marginal issues in the views of local inhabitants of highland Albania.

One could hypothesise that damages from large carnivores are not viewed as a major problem, simply because, quantitatively speaking, not many damage cases occur. Data on damages from large carnivores in Albania are extremely scarce. There is no form of public record or national monitoring system dedicated to this particular issue. This is partly because Albania does not implement any form of financial compensation system for damages from large predators, unlike the majority of European countries (Kaczensky 1999). Given this, livestock breeders and farmers have no incentive to report attack incidents, nor an entity or institution to which they can be reported. The very few cases that are reported (however not systematically recorded), are actually non-fatal attacks to livestock, simply because in these cases local

veterinarians of the state veterinary service are required for medical help for livestock injured by predators (Mersini pers. comm.). One quantitative proxy on the extent of large carnivore-related damages comes from a questionnaire-based study conducted in 2006-07 (Keçi et al. 2008, Trajçe et al. 2008). Out of 320 local rural inhabitants of mountainous areas of northern and eastern Albania interviewed about cases of livestock depredation in their regions in the last 12 months, 256 people (80%) confirmed of knowing cases of sheep being killed by wolves, 26 (8.12%) of sheep being killed by bears and 3 (0.94%) by lynx. 173 people (54.06%) confirmed cases of goats being killed by wolves, 12 (3.75%) by bears and 3 (0.94%) by lynx. Moreover, there were 79 individuals confirming about cattle being killed by wolves and 33 by bears. Full details on the number of reports on livestock damages from this study are given Table 5.1.

Tab. 5.1. Number of respondents' confirmations on domestic animals killed by predators in their areas in the last 12 months. In total 320 locals were interviewed during 2006-07 in mountainous regions of north and east Albania. Adapted from Keçi et al. (2008) *and Trajçe et al.* (2008).

	Lynx	Bear	Wolf	Jackal	Fox	Unknown	Total
Sheep	3	26	258	1	-	-	288
Goats	3	12	173	-	-	-	188
Pigs	-	3	7	-	-	-	10
Cattle	-	33	79	-	-	-	112
Dogs	-	1	104	-	-	-	105
Poultry	-	-	-	-	99	2	101
Donkeys	-	2	89	-	-	-	91
Horses	-	3	40	-	-	-	43
Beehives	-	14	-	-	-	-	14

Considering the above, it can be deduced that incidences of damages caused by large carnivores seem to be not such a rare phenomenon. As the majority of respondents seem to confirm, damages are quite widespread and frequent, especially in the case of wolves. This fact was also noted throughout my fieldwork. A quantitative estimation of damages was not within the remit of my research, however since the onset of fieldwork it was clearly noticeable that there were hardly any respondents who could not recall recent occurrences of livestock depredation or crop raiding by predators in their area. Yet, these widespread occurrences of damages from large carnivores did not seem to evoke major antagonistic feelings among the local population. Instead, they were largely considered as a fact of life in the mountains, something that is bound to happen if one lives in areas where predators live as well.

That being said, a major discrepancy that I noted while doing fieldwork in Munella and Shebenik was that between generalised statements on existence of damages and specific statements on personal experiences with damages from large carnivores, and in particular about wolves. I shall seek to elaborate further on this. I will be focusing on wolves in this analysis, since bears and lynx were not considered problematic species in regard to damages and this is also reflected in quantitative estimations of their damages, which seem to be negligible in comparison to wolves (Keçi et al. 2008, Trajçe et al. 2008). This difference in damage perceptions was prominent also during my ethnographic exploration. As amply indicated in chapters 3 and 4, damages from bears were regarded as unusual occurrences coming from odd or badly behaving individuals, whereas damages from lynx were virtually non-existent in the views of local people. Wolves, on the other hand, were widely considered to cause frequent damages to local economies and there was hardly any respondent who did not acknowledge the existence of recent damages in their respective regions. Usual reactions from respondents

when queried about damages from wolves in their areas, would be to strongly affirm that damages are frequent and that wolves cause many problems in the area. However, when following up with questions on whether the respondents themselves had suffered damages on livestock or other property, the usual responses would be negative, stating that they themselves had not had any from wolves, but that they knew this from other people who had suffered them. Few people acknowledged damages on personal property. It seemed that affirmations on the widespread and frequent damages from wolves were coming mostly as third-party experiences and not through actual lived experiences of respondents. The knowledge platform on which respondents based their judgements on wolves as problematic creatures seemed to be, in most cases, generated from experiences of other people, be those other people in the village, in the neighbouring village, or even just rumours they had heard about these events happening somewhere in the region.

Many conversations I had in both regions confirmed this pattern. One villager from Stebleva (Sh), who owned a few hundred livestock (sheep and goats) stated: "*The wolves… the wolves are a big problem. They cause a lot of damage!*". After I asked about whether he had personally suffered damages on his flock lately, he stated: "*No, not to me! Never to me. I have dogs, big Sharri dogs*[1] *… and they do their job [they] keep wolves away!*".

I faced this conundrum throughout my entire fieldwork process. On the one hand, general statements on damages from wolves seemed to almost universally indicate that they were abundant and frequent, on the other hand the same people, would rarely give personal experiences as examples to back up these statements.

[1] A renowned breed of livestock guarding dogs in the Balkans, claimed to originate from the Sharri mountain region in the border areas between Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia (Lescureux et al. 2014, Yilmaz et al. 2015)

"*The most negative animal of the area is the wolf… this is what people think. This is because of damages on livestock… the wolf causes more damage to livestock*" claimed a villager from Thirra (Mu), who was working as a local forest guard, and owned a few livestock as well. A while later during our conversation, he specified: "*The wolf has never damaged any of my sheep. I've only heard cases of attacks on livestock from others… I've been told.*"

I noted that, the people who were more at ease to confirm personal damages on livestock, were respondents with whom I had former acquaintance or who already knew about my work in the region. In addition, when discussions were made following a more formal interview-style by using a recorder or a set of semi-structured questions, damages on personal property would be more readily talked about. On the other hand, in more informal discussions such as café-based group talks with villagers, personal experiences with damage would rarely come up. While, in such discussions, the problem of wolves was almost unanimously pointed out by group participants, their statements were, however, usually kept at impersonal levels and without going into details and particularities of actual attack instances. Examples of depredation cases were given from occurrences which had happened somewhere else, usually in another village, and to somebody not present in the discussion circle, while concrete examples which had happened to group participants were rare and evasive. This observation was by no means a strict rule that applied to every conversation and every respondent, however, it can be argued that it was a general pattern that seemed to point out a certain reservation from respondents when damages from wolves on personal property were concerned. Finding and talking with people who actually had suffered damages from wolves, and were open to discuss about them, would prove to be quite a challenging task. At times, it felt as if damages from wolves were always happening to 'someone else' and 'somewhere else' and never to the person or group of

people I happened to be talking to. While doing fieldwork, I often found myself in situations where I was always trying to chase actual damage cases, which were always happening '*somewhere'* according to respondents, but never actually managing to witness one (through a carcass or an injured animal[2]) and rarely having the chance to meet with the actual *person* who suffered *the damage*. The events of one of my initial field trips to Munella illustrate the archetype of such situations. During a conversation with a shepherd from Kodër-Spaç, he told me that a cousin of his, living in the nearby village of Pshqesh, had recently experienced damages to livestock: wolves had killed a dozen of his sheep. I immediately thought to myself that this represented a great opportunity to meet and discuss with someone who actually had a recent experience of damages from wolves. Pshqesh village was only half an hour away by car and the insights provided by his cousin would prove very valuable for my work. Obviously, I made a quick decision to go and meet with this person afterwards. While the discussion with the shepherd from Kodër-Spaç was nearing the end, I asked whether he could put me in contact with his cousin, so that I could have a broadly similar talk as the one I just had with him on large carnivores. The shepherd agreed without hesitation, and gave me the mobile number of his cousin. He told me that he would notify his cousin of my visit himself, while I'd be on my way to Pshqesh. When I phoned the shepherd's cousin to arrange for a discussion, he already knew of my visit and we agreed to meet at the entrance of the village in a few minutes. We met on the road at the entrance of the village, however, it was evident straight away that a lengthy discussion with him was not feasible at the moment as he seemed to be quite in a hurry to go somewhere. After the initial greetings, he apologised that he could not stay for even one

[2] I managed to verify one case of a donkey killed by wolves in the village Malaj in Mirditë (Mu), after a local respondent informed me on the occurrence (details and photo evidence in Chapter 3).

coffee with me and discuss as he had to travel to a nearby village for some personal matters. Not to lose the opportunity while I had him there, I quickly raised the topic of wolf damages, by asking him directly to tell me more about the recent attacks he had experienced. His answer and reaction at my query were entirely unexpected. He claimed straight away that he had not experienced any damages from wolves, not only recently, but he could not recall any personal damages from wolves at all. When I explained that I was told about this case by his cousin, the shepherd from Kodër-Spaç, he claimed that his cousin must have been mistaken with another case that happened in the village quite some months ago. That was the only case he could recall about wolf damages in his village, but it had not happened to him, and was definitively not a recent case like the shepherd from Kodër-Spaç told me. Throughout the brief discussion he showed signs of discomfort and unwillingness to talk further about this issue and seemed troubled and anxious to leave as soon as possible. I was puzzled by the outcome of this situation, however, given his apparent hurry to leave, I bade him farewell and we parted. At the time, I did not put much importance to this occurrence, thinking it might have been a matter of prior miscommunication between the shepherd and his cousin. If not that, then either the shepherd directed me to his cousin in vain, by giving me a false information about recent wolf attacks, or his cousin was the one lying and not admitting to wolf attacks on his livestock. Back then, I could not see any reason for the latter two to be the case, so I assumed it was just a miscommunication issue, which wasted little of my time and nothing more than that and therefore, I did not follow up the case to verify it further. However, the unfolding of future fieldwork events and difficulties in pinning down actual depredation cases, led me reconsider whether the above case was just a miscommunication issue. What I had likely witnessed

instead, was a manifestation of underlying stigmatisations related to wolf damages, and cultural responses to attack cases.

The dynamics of discussions observed with several respondents when the topic of damages would come up, give reason to believe that attacks from wolves were not always openly confessed among locals. Initially, I did not consider such a possibility, going for a far easier assumption that damages from wolves were not as common as respondents seemed to claim. I assumed that, exaggerations were made as a consequence of negative historic and cultural legacies wolves have as a species (not only in Albania, but also worldwide) and because of negative perceptions embedded among locals through generations, and that they had no strong foundations in current and lived experiences of local people. The fact that the abundance of wolf damages was mostly stated through impersonal occurrences and as general statements, and quite rarely with concrete examples of recent attacks, seemed to support this assumption. Furthermore, my personal bias as someone with a nature conservation background and a pro-wolf minded individual in general, tended to downplay wolf damages from being widespread and plentiful, thinking that exaggerations were manifestations of the wolves' notorious reputation rather than based on factual depredation events. Considering the scarcity of claims on personal damages by wolves, as well as lack of 'hard facts' (i.e. actual depredation cases) reported to me by local contacts, this assessment seemed quite logical and backed up by the (lack of) evidence at hand. However, the more I focused on particularities and details around issues of wolf damages, the more complex the problem was revealed to be. Beliefs and superstitions around wolves seemed to play an important role in the way people talked about these animals in daily discourse, and consequently seemed to have an influence in damage

representation. Furthermore, customary traditions and codes of honour prevailing among villagers in highland Albania seem to be quite influential in this respect as well.

One of the most prominent and specific beliefs on the 'other' people whom respondents' would claim to have had damages from wolves, was that, in almost every case, "*they deserved it*". In many situations of informal and relaxed group discussions with locals (like in village bars and cafés), one or more members of the group would quickly recall a recent and nearby case of wolves attacking someone's property; that 'someone' almost never being present in the discussion circle, but a person mutually known to participants who was living in the village or in a neighbouring village. Subsequently, the discussion of the person who had experienced an attack from wolves on their livestock would often revolve around the belief that the attack had not happened by chance, but deservedly to *that* particular person. Local opinion on sufferers of wolf attacks, seemed to converge on the agreement that they 'had it coming', usually because they were seen as people who committed unfair things or were ill-behaved among the community. This belief was often discussed among groups of locals amidst high tones of humour, however, also with a sense of satisfaction towards the fact that the attack had occurred to that particular person. Such attacks, would be described almost as prophetic events, as acts that were somehow expected to happen to the people who suffered them, given their notorious behaviour and ill-marked reputation in the region. Respondents would often speak of these attacks as revenge acts 'controlled from above', implying that wolves were ordered by a higher power – God – to execute the attack. *"[…] because you should know something. The wolf and the snake don't take anything without an order from God. For instance, I have plenty of sheep, but the wolf doesn't come to take my sheep. He goes and takes the sheep of that other guy, who has committed sins. The snake is the same,*" stated a shepherd from Letëm village (Sh). Attacks

were often interpreted as acts of justice, usually because the people who suffered them had committed malicious actions or sins prior to the attack, or because the group was of the opinion that they were wrongdoers in general. I have described at length this superstition around attacks of wolves in Chapter 3. It would seem that suffering an attack from wolves opened up malicious gossip opportunities among locals and the concerned victim would become a centre of negative attention, having his 'sins' enumerated by the village café, usually involving events or things which had no link whatsoever with the depredation suffered by wolves. A café discussion with two local foresters from Dorëz (Sh) clearly evidences the depth and extent of this belief among locals:

Forester 1: "*The wolf had taken five goats from Guri Rasa[3]'s flock.*"

Forester 2: "*That's because Guri hasn't paid the money he owes for using the pastures. [laughs]*"

Forester 1: *"He also cuts fir[4] trees. I have caught him cutting fir trees."*

Forester 2 [turns to me]: *"The people here believe that whoever does damages and evil, will suffer attacks from wolves. The wolf goes to those people."*

Me: *"So, the wolf would cause damage to those people who would do bad things?"*

Forester 2: *"Yes, the wolf would attack people who are not correct."*

[3] Actual name of the person has been changed for reasons of privacy.

[4] Fir (*Abies sp.*) seems to hold a special status among trees in highland Albania as they were highly valued for their aesthetics and rarity (when compared to beech or oak for example) by villagers. Albeit being also valued for its high quality timber, locals would often actively engage in protecting fir trees and condemn people who would cut them.

Forester 1: *"For instance, that person has left his 8-9 years old son to guard the goats in the mountain. How can he do this? […] The children in Tirana play, go to parks, go to school. He utilises his son for work instead; he exploits him."*

Forester 2: *"He's negative. He's a very negative person."*

The wolf was thus, perhaps unintentionally, given the role of a 'justice-maker' by locals, who widely believed that they were used by higher powers to exact revenge on people who had committed wrongdoings or had a notorious reputation in the community. The person suffering the attack was almost always someone who did not deserve sympathy for the occurrence. Attacks from wolves seemed to open up opportunities for other people in the community for enumerating wrongdoings and other sins that the attack sufferer had committed in the past. Considering the personal and social stigma from a successful wolf attack on a flock, it might be reasonable to deduce that locals had good reasons not to be open in regard to instances of depredation that affected themselves. Fearing that the attack would fuel negative gossip towards them and brand them as 'bad people' in the community, many locals who might have suffered damages probably kept a low profile about them. Signs of discomfort were clearly visible among several respondents when asked directly about personal damages from wolves, similar to the case of the villager from Pshqesh mentioned above.

Other beliefs about wolves posed additional hindrances for talking openly about them in general. A widespread local belief implied that even mentioning the wolf's name would be reason for the wolf to appear and attack the flock of the person who mentioned it. Most respondents seemed to take this latter belief lightly (contrary to the previous belief on wolf attacks as signs of justice from 'above', to which people seemed to adhere more) describing it

as something that belonged to the past, and largely stated that people these days do not believe in it anymore. Nonetheless, an underlying and slight unease was observed, at times, among a few respondents when the subject of wolves would come up in discussions. Respondents would often use euphemisms like "*i pagoji*" (the mouthless one), "*gojëmshelti*" or "*gojëmbylluri*" (the closed-mouth), when referring to wolves, in attempts to avoid mentioning the exact name of the animal (see Chapter 3 for a more detailed account of this belief). While this belief did not prevent most people from talking openly about wolves, thus not hampering the collection of information and material about wolves and their damages – as it was made clear by respondents on multiple occasions that it was nothing more than a legend or a myth – it still represents an indicator of stigmas around wolves and beliefs that one has to 'keep quiet' about them if they want to avoid any future trouble.

Other explanatory reasons as to why local people were prone to hide or not openly accept damages from wolves are to be found in traditions and codes of honour governing social and individual lives of people in highland Albania. Villagers in Munella and Shebenik, much as in the rest of mountainous Albania, follow customary rules intended for the preservation of the personal and family's integrity and wellbeing, cumulatively known as *Kanun*. I have mentioned aspects of these codes in Chapter 4, when discussing the spatial interrelationships between people and large carnivores in Albania. Among the most important features of the Albanian customary codes are *nderi* (honour, in the sense of social and economic success) and *burrnija* (manliness, in the sense of having strengths to defend and protect the self, the family and property). These customary features were prevalent also among shepherds in the two areas, who always showed a high sense of responsibility towards their livestock. Securing the protection and wellbeing of their flock is seen as an indicator of their economic success as a

shepherd and their success as a 'man', in terms of their understanding of masculinity, who is supposed to provide for his family and to protect his property. On several occasions, I encountered shepherds who would speak ill of other shepherds who were claimed to have experienced attacks from wolves. Attacks from wolves were seen as an indicator of inadequate care and responsibility towards the flock. Shepherds (and many other locals in general) seemed to share a common opinion on reasons triggering wolf attacks on livestock in that they would primarily happen because of recklessness shown by the person (or people) designated to look and care after the flock. Recklessness and lack of diligence while guarding and grazing sheep was highly condemned among villagers. Wolves were rarely held at fault in cases of attacks, especially if such incidents occurred because of negligence of shepherds in doing their job. A shepherd's lack of attention in properly guarding of sheep was largely seen as the main reason for an attack to happen, while the predatory nature of wolves was rarely, if ever, blamed in these cases. "*A wolf is paid to kill sheep*", stated a shepherd in Shebenik, implying and mentioning that wolves are doing nothing more than "*their job*" when they perform attacks on livestock, much like a shepherd is hired and paid for doing his job as guardian of sheep (Fig. 5.1.). Expectations from shepherds to do their job properly in safeguarding sheep, were seen just as normal as expectations from wolves to do their job in attacking sheep. A wolf killing a sheep had nothing more extraordinary at it than did a shepherd guarding it – they were both supposed to perform normal functions and tasks related to their jobs in the opposite sides of the spectrum. "*There was a case in 1998 in Miraka mountain, when wolves killed one hundred sheep! However, I do not blame the wolves for that. It was the shepherd's fault as he left the livestock alone. He enclosed them in the pen and went down to the village. If there would have been someone guarding the sheep, there would have been no chance for wolves to attack.*" a

forester from Dorëz village (Sh) recalled. Locals spoke unkindly of shepherds who were not doing their job properly, which would lead to livestock being attacked. "*To the wolf, you have to stay standing*" stated one of the most experienced shepherds I met in Shebenik. He continued that if the shepherd would sit or lay down to have a rest while livestock were grazing in the pastures, the risk from wolves would increase and the shepherd would be at fault if an attack occurred. In highland Albania, it is a shepherd's obligation to always be vigilant and wary of wolves.

It would seem that both *nderi* and *burrnija* of a shepherd were at stake when it came to protecting livestock from wolves. A failure to protect sheep properly could give way to bad-mouthing of the shepherd from other shepherds and villagers and ultimately threaten his established *nderi* and *burrnija*. A good shepherd is ever-vigilant not only because he needs to protect his flock, but also because he needs to protect his honour and manhood. Thus an attack on livestock is much more than that: it is an attack on the honour and manliness of the shepherd. In this regard, if wolves succeed to kill livestock through an attack, they do not just kill livestock, they also dishonour and emasculate the shepherd through the very same act.

Besides issues of honour and manliness linked to the protection of the flock, customary and historic codes of highland Albania go into great detail about the specific tasks and responsibilities that shepherds have towards the flock, whether they are the owners of the flock, or just hired as workmen to take care after the flock of someone else (or belonging to a group of people). The herdsman has the task of ensuring that no harm is caused to the flock and that the flock does not cause harm to others (Gjeçovi & Fox 1989), such as preventing it from entering in arable fields and plantations, or in pastures that belong to other people. Continuous vigilance towards the flock is required at all times and in any circumstance "*The herdsman is*

obliged to guard the livestock, regardless of whether they are fenced in or not, since 'livestock must be guarded because they move, but the earth does not shift.'" and "*If damage occurs due to inattention of the herdsman, the damage is his responsibility and he must make restitution.*" (Gjeçovi & Fox 1989). The shepherd is held responsible for any damage caused to livestock, if they are looking after livestock which are not their own, but belong to another owner and have been leased to them: "*If any head of livestock is harmed, the herdsman is responsible for the damage and he must compensate for the loss, in order to restore the number of livestock to its original total.*"

Fig. 5.1. Armed shepherd in Vithkuq region, southern Albania.

These customary rules and codes of honour outlined above coupled with local beliefs about the non-randomness of wolf attacks (i.e. attacks being commanded from 'above' as a punishment for something bad that that person has done) seem to play a key role in defining

the reputation of a shepherd. Cases of depredation could provide serious reasons for criticising the image of a shepherd and, moreover, even risk branding him as a 'bad person' or wrongdoer in general. In highland Albania, preserving a reputation as a good shepherd is intrinsically tied with the preservation of reputation as a good person.

Considering how damages from wolves seem to be highly enmeshed with beliefs, stigmatisations and issues of honour, it would not be unrealistic to assume that actual depredation instances were not openly revealed or discussed by locals. This realisation explains the conundrum I often faced in the field, where general statements on abundance of wolf damages were very rarely backed up through personal examples. While simple and plain exaggeration of damages were probably part of the issue, with many respondents just claiming abundance of attacks based on common knowledge or as widely known fact about wolves, local beliefs and customary traditions seem to play a role in withholding information on actual personal wolf attacks. Through impersonal and generalised statements, it would seem that locals wanted to express that wolves were problematic and that damages were widespread and frequent, and by doing this they hoped to evidence 'physical damages' caused by wolves. However, they would step back when damages on their personal property were concerned, mostly due to worries of 'moral damage' to their persona if such instances were to surface and become known in the community.

Under these circumstances, one has to pose the question as to why would locals in highland Albania be open about damages from wolves if they would risk (i) becoming the centre of negative attention fuelled by local beliefs about wolves (ii) having their honour and manliness put to question by a failure to adequately protect sheep and (iii) risking to damage their image as reputable and worthy shepherds in the community? My logical assumption, backed up by

observations from the field, is that locals would probably not be open about damages but would keep a low profile and be silent about them instead. Preserving the integrity and honour of oneself in the community seemed to be much more important than lamenting losses from wolves.

Communication situations presented during my ethnographic exploration, in which information given by respondents seemed to be indirect, evasive and implied rather than factual and direct, were not just common in the case of damages, but also for many other aspects of village life. In fact, evasiveness and indirect answers would come up in many attempts of mine to get some factual information out of respondents, such as, for instance, the number of livestock or beehives owned. Direct questions like these would be usually faced with evasive answers from respondents like "*I have enough*", "*a few dozen*" or "*some 10-20 livestock (beehives)*" often in apparent discomfort and signs of unwillingness to further talk about this. In several occasions, I was told that people prefer to not state the exact number of livestock or beehives they own, due to a widespread belief that if one reveals the true number of their livestock or beehives, then they are destined to diminish in numbers. While local beliefs seem to have played a role in this, what I was generally facing when confronting local people about factual information, be that on damages or on numbers of livestock in general, was related to communication approaches within cultural contexts (Hall 1977). Routine communication in rural Albania neither uses many words nor detailed information to transmit messages between communicators, instead it largely lets the cultural context explain most of the meanings. Particularities related to factual information are often left unsaid or are presumed to be self-explanatory during dialogues between members of a group. These indirect forms of communication are considered to provide better grounds for negotiating, saving someone's

face and to avoid embarrassment coming from confrontation of mistakes or problems through plain facts and evidence. This communication context was also confirmed by my role as an interlocutor in the dynamics of discussions and in my acquaintance with people I was talking to. As mentioned earlier, people who were more at ease and open while talking on the topic of damages suffered on personal property were people who already knew me and knew about my work, given that I had been involved for several years in work dealing with nature conservation in these areas. Evidently, these people had fewer reasons to withhold information from me and tended to be more direct, given our prior acquaintance and familiarity with each other's work and roles in the region. Another usual situation when damages on personal property seemed to be more readily confessed was when I would conduct discussions following a more formal interview style, through the use of a questionnaire form and/or use of a voice recorder. Even though, on the whole, this form of communication seemed to be much less preferred by locals, who, in many cases, showed a clear sense of discomfort and apparent unnaturalness in the flow of the discussion, it seemed to be successful for recording confirmations of damages on personal property. The direct question-answer setting would leave little space for talking 'around the point' and if the question requirement would be to answer if personal damages had been experienced, no alternatives beyond 'yes' or 'no' are left to the respondent. In addition, as this style of discussion was completely out of context and place – when compared for instance to the conventional free-flowing café discussions or informal talks with people in their homes or up in the *stani*-s – it probably solicited responses which would also be out of place in any other conversational setting. A probable explanation to this, is that respondents might have considered this type of formal communication as a tool to report their actual damages to someone who might offer help in return. On many occasions, respondents questioned me on

whether I was working for the government and if any compensation was predicted for damages caused by large carnivores. As I often had to reiterate my position as a researcher, it was understandable that respondents tended to associate this form of questionnaire-based communication with government matters, and as a consequence were more prone to be open about damages from large carnivores, probably hoping for some possible financial compensation by the state.

Both cases strongly highlight that my role as an interlocutor and the position I had in the communicating group had a crucial importance in the openness shown when issues from predators were discussed. Whether respondents were talking to Aleksander, the conservationist, who they already knew and who had been dealing with large carnivore matters in their regions for several years, or someone popping up out of nowhere and who is recording and writing up everything that they say, influenced greatly the communication style and the way how information was presented in discussions. To rightfully approach and get access on information about personal damages to livestock or other property in highland Albania, one has to be fully aware of one's role as interlocutor within this context and the expectations that are put on them when such potentially delicate situations are discussed with members of the community.

5.3. Is ‘damage’ always a ‘problem’?

Damage: *Physical harm that impairs the value, usefulness, or normal function of something.*

Problem: *A matter or situation regarded as unwelcome or harmful and needing to be dealt with and overcome.*

(Oxford Dictionary of English, 2010)

The primary presumption on damages from large carnivores on human economies, is that they are by default static and factual and do not extend beyond physical and material aspects of attacks. This definition based on evidence and factualness implies that damages ought to be perceived equally as such by the different parties who have to deal with them. A sheep that has been killed by a wolf, represents a dead sheep in the eyes of the shepherd who owned it, the veterinarian who verified it and the government official who recorded and filed the case. Following this logic, we could conclude that a dead sheep represents damage in the views of all parties involved, be that as a direct experiencer of damage (shepherd, livestock owner) or an indirect experiencer of damage (veterinarian, government official, conservationist, etc.). The subsequent issue to address is whether the damage represented in that dead sheep is perceived and evaluated as a ‘problem’ by all the parties involved, be those direct or indirect experiencers of damage. While this issue might seem trivial or unworthy of attention, it is of crucial importance in defining societal and individual responses to damages. If the damage is considered a problem, efforts are then made by concerned parties to repair that damage as much as possible. This simple passage from damage to problem might go unnoticed in daily discourse since material damage is generally perceived to be problematic. While this holds true in the vast majority of cases, many situations in daily life illustrate that even the static metric

we put on damage can have varying interpretations regarding its problematicity by the parties involved in it; be those causing or suffering damage. If, for instance we compare the societal and individual responses to a window being broken by kids while playing ball in neighbourhood versus a window broken by a burglar in a failed thievery attempt, then this problematicity gradient we vest to material damage becomes apparent. We can contend that, even though the material, physical and financial amount of the damage is equal in both cases, in the first instance the damage caused is perceived and transformed into much less of a problem by the sufferer than in the second case. While the post-damage responses in the first case would be more likely limited to a bilateral arrangement and agreement between parties involved in the incident, in the second case the recourse would be much more different and it would most likely require the involvement of third-parties. Expectedly, in the second case the house-owner will follow-up on the damage with a series of actions (such as police notification, suing of malefactor, instalment of an alarm system, etc.) that would guarantee retribution for the damage suffered and would minimise the risk of such incidents happening in the future. While this might be an overly simplified and hypothetical example from daily life, it illustrates how material damage, even though static and factual by definition, can have shifting degrees of problematicity, depending on the kinds and intentions of people involved in it and surrounding circumstances of the occurrence.

Similar analogies could be made to damages caused by large carnivores in highland Albania. My noted perceptions of, and responses to, damages by large carnivores largely indicate that they are not always treated as or transformed into problems that require recourse and retribution, first and foremost by the people who suffer these damages themselves. Local reactions to depredation cases can vary from complete tolerance and acceptance of kills as part

of "*life in the mountains*" to outrage and contravention leading to retribution measures. Such perceptions and responses to damages seem to be dependent on the spatial and moral dimensions of the incident. In highland Albania, damage is perceived as being more problematic when it threatens the integrity of the house (or human space) and the individual. If damage caused by large predators does not touch on the above entities, its problematicity is interpreted as being low and usually no recourse or retribution actions are taken, or, at least, believed to be required. Further to that, there seems to be a high probability of damage cases which are not revealed at all, in an attempt to preserve the individual's personal and professional integrity among other members of the community. To illustrate the shifting problematicity of damages from large carnivores we can go back to the perceived spatial relationships of home and belonging between people and predators. If a bear kills a sheep up in the mountain pastures and forests, the damage caused is often defined as 'acceptable' by the shepherd who suffered it and largely tolerated, given that the territory where it happened is perceived and interpreted by the shepherd to belong to the bear, i.e. the "home" of the bear. By defining this territory as the bear's home, the shepherd acknowledges that he is an intruder in this space, and readily accepts any possible damage as a form of retribution by the bear. However, if the bear causes damage in or near a territory defined as a human home, retribution actions by humans seem to be inevitable, even if the damage does not pose major significance in financial and material terms. A similar interpretation is extended to wolf damages, however, with added negative views and less tolerance shown, given their perception as creatures that "have no home". This vagabond-ish depiction of wolves makes any attack from them anywhere to be condemned given that there is no reciprocal relationship of space between humans and wolves, and because wolves disregard more frequently perceived and constructed spaces of

human homes. In spite of that, shepherds were demonstrably more prone to accept wolf damages if they would occur in mountains and forests, places which they deemed rightful for being home to wolves and where they wanted wolves to be. Lynx, on the other hand, are largely perceived to not cause damage at all, and consequently, even the potential for problem-making is not there in their case.

Further to the connection between damage and home integrity, preserving personal integrity comes up as another determining factor in interpreting damages as problematic in highland Albania. Customary practices in the region require for a heightened sense of responsibility for property, with no exception made for livestock. Historic codes outlined in the *Kanun* are witness to these regulations, implying that the reputation and integrity of a herdsman stands in the adequate care shown towards the flock. In addition, existing beliefs and superstitions around damages from wolves in Albania can have repercussions on a shepherd's image and his honour. If a shepherd is not doing his work diligently and this results in livestock being attacked and killed by wolves, then that shepherd's reputation is under threat. It seems highly likely that, in cases of depredation, shepherds keep a low profile and are not vocal about the event in attempt to save their face and avoid negative gossip and attention by members of the community. In light of this, it is sensible to deduct that damages from large carnivores, are problematic if they do pose threats to the integrity and honour of the person who owns or is assigned to look after the livestock. Again, material aspects of damage take a minor, if not negligible, role in this case. In highland Albania, damages to the image, integrity and honour of the individual are the real problematic damages from large carnivores.

Disregarding the shifting problematicity of damages leads to a common presumption in wildlife management that all damages are to be considered and treated as problematic, at least

by people who directly experience them. This assumption is most apparent in mitigation schemes for large carnivore depredation, designed and implemented by state authorities or non-profit institutions that seek to reconcile interests between nature conservation and local livelihoods. In their most usual representation, impacts are quantified and packaged as a financial dimension of issues with large carnivores. Factual and quantitative documentation of physical damages from large carnivores is often required by the need to provide information for compensation schemes and programmes which are widely implemented as a tool for mitigating human-large carnivore conflicts across the European continent. This approach is indeed logical and helpful when relationships between large carnivores and people are governed by the need to ensure conservation of predators on the one hand and mitigation measures for people suffering impacts from them on the other. The central presupposition here is that impacts from large carnivores are perceived and constructed in financial terms by all human parties involved in it. However, as extensively argued above, to local people in highland Albania, financial aspects seem to play a marginal role in their judgement of problematic damages, which are more influenced by perceptions of space, belonging and morality. The moral dimension of damages from large carnivores in Albania seems to outweigh the economic or financial side of them. In frequent occasions during my fieldwork in Munella and Shebenik, I noted how financial aspects of damages had a secondary role in the judgement of respondents. A multitude of cases confirmed that problematic aspects of damages were related to breaches in perceived and established relationships between people and large carnivores, rather than financial aspects of the damage caused. One shepherd from Kodër-Spaç (Mu), expressed greater concerns for the fact that wolves had killed his donkey next to his house, rather than the 50 goats he had lost to wolves over the last few years while grazing his flock up in the

mountains. Similarly, a shepherd from Pishkash village (Sh) seemed to be more worried about a recent incident where a bear had damaged his corn plantation next to his home, while expressing more tolerant views of a bear attacking and killing two of his livestock up in the mountains. In both cases it was evident that the financial dimension of damages seems to have very little influence on what locals consider as problematic behaviour of large carnivores, while infringements of territorial spaces considered to belong to humans seem to be crucial in defining attacks from large carnivores as problematic.

This realisation has clear ramifications for current and future management and conservation initiatives on large carnivores. I contend that the shifting problematicity of damages in Munella and Shebenik is existing as such, under human-large carnivore relationships that are largely self-governed by locals in these areas. There seem to be no outside factors or actors influencing these two-sided relationships between locals and large predators in Albania. I will discuss this in the following chapter, however it is important to stress here that, unlike the majority of European countries where relationships between locals and large carnivores are rarely uninfluenced by outside agencies and institutions aiming at the conservation of predators or improvement of rural livelihoods (or both), in Albania this influence is non-existent, or at best, is very weak. Currently conservation and management efforts intended for large carnivores are marginal, and the very few serious initiatives come from the civil society sector and not from government authorities. Albania does not implement any compensation system for large carnivores. All three species are protected by law, however this protection is largely just on paper, as there are no real efforts on the ground to ensure the protection of these species. In essence, locals are left to their own means to deal with issues from large carnivores. This situation, even though in appearance seems to be detrimental for the survival of large

carnivores, proves to be quite key in maintaining a shifting view on damages and the scale of problem they pose.

Conservationists and other outside agencies intervening for the protection and preservation of large carnivores, often work on the assumption that damages from large carnivores are unequivocally considered as problematic by the people who suffer them and, given this, they outline measures intended to alleviate these problems. One of the most common measures undertaken by conservationists for mitigating damages caused by large carnivores to the local population living closest to them is to provide financial compensation for said damages. The benefits and pitfalls of compensations schemes have been largely debated (Bulte & Rondeau 2005) and their success (or lack of) is largely dependent on several factors related to efficiency in identifying damages and fairness in financial distribution (Dickman et al. 2011, Nyhus et al. 2003).

In spite of site-specific particularities and variations in methods of implementation, compensation schemes have largely a static view on what constitutes damage from large carnivores. Damage is quantified into financial terms in order to provide the necessary compensation incentive to people who have suffered them. While the process is seemingly simple and straightforward, the requirement for such a scheme to function is for damage to be viewed under the same financial perspective by both parties involved in the compensation transaction: the provider of compensation (conservationists; government agencies) and receiver of compensation (livestock owner). My extensive observations on local perceptions of and beliefs around damages from large carnivores in highland Albania, suggest that financial dimensions of such incidents are marginal compared to their moral dimensions. The potential implementation of a compensation scheme could have unexpected consequences for existing

interrelationships between people and large predators in Albania. Other financial schemes aimed at increasing coexistence between people and predators have by-passed the focus on compensation for direct damages by instead focusing on 'payment for tolerance' (Ericsson et al. 2008, Zabel & Holm-Muller 2008). This shift notably solves issues of funds misuse, frauds with claimed damages and dissatisfactions on values of compensations by directly paying local stakeholders who share environments with large predators on their acceptance of the latter in their vicinities. Such payments for tolerance have proven to be more successful than traditional compensation schemes, however, they still depict tolerance and coexistence on a financial metric and work on the presumption that the locals relationships with large predators is largely dependent on economic incentives (Harvey et al. 2016). The implementation of such financial schemes, be those either as classic compensation mechanisms or as payment for tolerance, bear the risk of transforming local relationships with large carnivores into a purely financial matter. Issues of morality, honour and responsibility among shepherds and other locals, as presented and discussed here, would be quickly overlooked and ignored in the wake of financial incentives introduced by conservationists. More broadly, any intervention by conservation actors, either through compensatory mechanisms, or through a top-down imposition of protection laws on large predators, would greatly transform existing relationships between locals and large carnivores. What is currently a largely dyadic (locals-carnivores) relationship will become a triadic (locals-conservationists-carnivores) one. The introduction of conservationists (here used as a broad term referring to any individuals, institutions or agencies working for the conservation of large carnivores) as an outside factor would bring about large changes in the way locals relate to, perceive and construct the image of large carnivores. In the

following chapter, I shall be discussing these possible changes by taking into consideration the historic, current and future context of conservation development in Albania.

5.4. Concluding remarks

Observations on large carnivore-induced damages reveal a multifaceted story in terms of how people in highland Albania interpret and respond to such occurrences. The ethnographic profile of these species reveals that large predators are largely constructed as social actors with specific roles and characteristics, partially linked to their ecological attributes. This role seems to be crucial in how damages induced by them are constructed, interpreted and responded to by locals as, in a multitude of cases, cultural and customary codes used for regulating social and individual life in highland Albania seem to extend to large carnivores as well. Moreover, as shown in Chapter 3 and extensively discussed here, these cultural norms seem to be highly entangled with beliefs and superstitions around these species; the latter having also a heavy influence on local reactions to damages. Work on damages from large carnivores in Albania evidences an important point related to cultural contexts of communication. In a high-context culture, problems are often talked around rather than talked about and this seems to hold true for issues of livestock depredation in Albania. The role of the interlocutor in such communication contexts is of primary importance in understanding and evidencing problems without the need to make use of stated and recorded factual information and by guaranteeing the integrity and face of the respondent. An important realisation is that damage problematicity is rarely constructed and evaluated in material and financial terms – what prevails is their linkage to moral issues and individual integrity.

These results can substantially contribute to two directions of conservation theory and practice. Firstly, they can contribute to current advancements in the field of conservation conflicts. Partitioning human-wildlife conflicts into human-human conflicts and human-wildlife impacts has provided a major advancement in repositioning and rehabilitating the role of animals in these relationships and extending responsibility for these issues beyond conservation biologists into various branches of humanities and social sciences. Nonetheless, while the latter have largely focused on the more obvious 'human-human conflicts', particular attention should be given to the (largely simplified) 'human-wildlife impacts'. This simplification and separation of impacts does well in highlighting the material side of issues from large carnivores and separating them from more acute problems faced in conflicts between different stakeholders (i.e. human-human conflicts). Nonetheless, it still leaves a similar 'terminology trap' as in the case of the 'human-wildlife conflicts' term, by constructing and defining animals as subjects that are in a perpetual damage-defined type of relationship with humans. My ethnographic work in highland Albania shows that local interpretations of damages go well beyond a simplified material or financial evaluation and extends into cultural and moral issues among people sharing environments with predators.

Secondly, these results can contribute to providing informed actions for the conservation and management of predators in Albania, as well as in other similar situations elsewhere. Mechanisms utilised for ensuring a stable and tolerant relationship between people and predators over the long term need to vastly consider the local context in relation to damage interpretation. Conservation schemes for large predators (or conservation measures in general) tend to be borrowed from external – mostly western – expertise and practice, which often arises in vastly different contexts and scenarios. The consideration of local particularities and

peculiarities in respect to damages from large predators can prove vastly helpful in avoiding future escalation of human-human conflicts related to said predators. Detailed aspects of this scenario will be discussed in the following chapter focusing on Albania's historic, current and future developments on nature conservation in general and large carnivores in particular.

6. The past, present and future of large carnivores and their conservation in Albania

In this section, I argue that the lack of observed human-human conflicts between people and large carnivores in Albania is primarily due to weak, or almost complete lack of, conservation efforts in the past and into present. To support this claim, I will present a brief historic review of nature conservation in general, and large carnivore conservation in particular, and will analyse the current situation in the country. Subsequently, I will discuss potential future implications and developments for large carnivore conservation considering Albania's social and economic development and its integration path towards western European political and economic structures.

6.1. Is there conflict if there is no conservation? A brief history of nature conservation and large carnivore conservation in Albania

It is widely observed that in countries where large carnivores have persisted alongside human populations high levels of tolerance prevail among people who share landscapes with predators (Boitani 1995, Chapron et al. 2014, Dorresteijn et al. 2014, Kellert et al. 1996). While historic coexistence and coadaptation mechanisms certainly play a crucial role in maintaining a tolerant relationship between people and large carnivores (Carter & Linnell 2016), my observations suggest that the existence of a dyadic relationship between locals and large carnivores which is largely undisturbed by outside actors, is essential to maintaining tolerance and avoiding the

creation of human-human conflicts in highland Albania. Human-human conflicts over wildlife are multifaceted problems that often involve and engage a wide range of interested parties. For example, the interests of farmers, livestock breeders, hunters, fishermen, foresters, government agencies, research institutions, non-profit organisations, animal rights groups and conservation agencies present many cases of concerns about wildlife.

Despite the differently configured range of stakeholders involved in specific human-human conflicts over wildlife, it would seem that one interest group, conservationists, is present in most of these cases. Basically, at the root of most cases of human-wildlife conflicts are differences between groups who prioritise conservation objectives and groups who prioritise other objectives, usually concerning livelihoods and economic development (Redpath et al. 2015). The role of conservationists in these situations is quite central to the conflicting relationships, as they represent the primary antagonistic party against other interest groups in cases when the conservation of nature is threatened. It is important to stress here that the 'conservationist' figure I am referring to is not a strictly defined one, and can include anyone from government officials in charge of nature conservation issues, to non-profit environmental organisations, biological and zoological researchers, to local activists or volunteers defending wildlife conservation agendas.

In Albania nature conservation is a relatively new and unconsolidated element in the ethics of governance. Historically there have been very few efforts to preserve natural habitats and ecosystems. Economic instability and political turmoil have often eclipsed environmental issues, which have never been considered as a priority in many of the past decades and up to the present. The first initiatives to preserve natural habitats can be traced back to the

establishment of the first protected areas in 1940, in the period of Italian occupation of Albania during World War II. The Tomorri mountain in south Albania was designated as a 'national park' and the Kune wetlands in Lezhë coastal area were designated as 'nature reserves' (Dida et al. 2003). With the establishment of the communist regime after WWII there was some progress in recognising necessities for nature protection, however efforts undertaken were still minimal and could not counter-balance the strong prioritisation of economic and industrial development. During the 1960s and 1970s a few national parks and reserves were established with very small areas (up to a couple thousand hectares at most). It is important to stress that the primary purpose of the establishment of these protected areas was not nature conservation *per se*, or preservation of a biodiversity spectrum found within this areas, but merely protection of conspicuous landscape features or forest areas, for purposes of recreation, education and game stocking. Six national forest parks were established in the 1960s encompassing small forested areas (the largest, Dajti National Forest Park, encompassing some 3300 hectares) which had aesthetic, educational and recreational values (Dida et al. 2003, FESH 1985). Given the very small size and lack of connectivity of these areas their functionality in terms of protecting a wide and representative spectrum of biological diversity or ensuring natural processes within ecosystems, was largely insignificant over the long term. On the other hand, designated reserves, were, in fact and by definition, hunting reserves, the primary purpose of which was to protect forested areas for the multiplication of game species like wild boar, hare, roe deer and wildfowl. Their populations were subsequently intended for hunting by elite members of the totalitarian government or other trusted people of the regime.

Around the same time the first legal provisions on the status of wildlife species began to be issued. Even though no formal classification was in place, given the way different species were

treated by the legislation and regulations at the time, it could be inferred that wild animals and birds were usually grouped as belonging to one of four categories (i) game species, (ii) protected species, (iii) pests and (iv) species without any particular status or human interest. Bears and lynx were classified as protected species, with bears being given their first legal protection in 1956 and lynx in 1969. Wolves, on the other hand, were classified as 'pest' species and their hunting was permitted and actively encouraged at any time of the year and by any means. Particularly after the stockbreeding sector was fully transferred to state ownership, within collective state-owned cooperative systems, wolves were particularly targeted as highly damaging to livestock and a bounty system was established to support and promote their killing. Further to that, the forestry service (the institution responsible for fauna management at the time) in cooperation with local cooperatives, would regularly undertake poisoning campaigns aimed at the reduction and extermination of wolves during the decades of the communist regime.

This situation remained relatively unchanged for several decades up to 1990. It is generally accepted that most wildlife species enjoyed favourable conditions during the communist regime, primarily due to stricter law enforcement measures and gun control which kept poaching to minimal levels. This opinion was widely shared and confirmed by older respondents during my ethnographic exploration. Locals often described the years of the totalitarian regime as a safe haven period for wildlife, especially for herbivore species such as wild boar, roe deer, chamois and hare. Throughout several discussions, older hunters would often use expressions like "*one could catch hares with their bare hands*" and "*one could kill a boar with just an axe*" to describe the abundance of brown hare and wild boar at the time. This positive situation with wildlife might have been partially reflected also for bears and lynx,

which enjoyed a protection status and their hunting was forbidden at all times. The situation for wolves was substantially different, since they were classified and considered as a 'pest species' and extensively hunted and poisoned. In spite of their active persecution, the wolf population never came close to extinction, even though it might have been subject to dramatic fluctuations over time (Bego 2005, Bego et al. 2002). This scenario was confirmed also by some older respondents during my fieldwork, who praised the efforts of the 'former regime' for exterminating wolves. As reported earlier in chapter 3, an old hunter from Gojan village (Mu) vividly recalled: "*Since Enver*[1] *died, the wolf has caused a lot of damage. Enver obliged the forestry to keep shepherds with goats in the mountain. They would poison a goat and leave it in the mountain. The fox would go to eat there and die, the wolf would go to eat there and die. People used to get rewards for killing wolves. After Enver died, no one was putting out poison anymore. At the time there used to be many hares. I used to go out hunting with my friends and we would see hares among the junipers without the need of [using] a zagar. Nowadays, I have two zagars, and I can stay a whole day in the mountain and not shoot anything. There are plenty of foxes – at that time there weren't foxes because they would eat the poisoned meat too. So the foxes would die and the hares would multiply. During Enver's time, there was no need to have protection [for livestock], you could leave the sheep the whole day outside and the wolf wouldn't go admits them.*"

While the communist period is generally praised for being more beneficial for wildlife (with the exception of so-called 'pest' species), this situation was probably a consequence of very strict regulations on gun ownership in general and an elitist appropriation of game species by members of the governing class, rather than adequate management and control of hunting

[1] Referring to Enver Hoxha, the political leader of communist Albania between 1945 and 1985.

activities in general. As a matter of fact signs of deterioration and increase in poaching were already observed by the late 1980s (Atkinson 1991, Bouvier & Kempf 1987), concomitant with the political and economic demise of the totalitarian government. This situation worsened even further once the social and political changes of the early 1990s began, which brought the end of the totalitarian era and the beginning of democratic developments in Albania. Political changes of the early 1990s opened the way for some legal improvements and advances in the nature conservation sector, by approximating and aligning Albanian frameworks with international standards and practices. The protected areas system, for instance, changed substantially, through the adoption of the IUCN protected areas framework, which increased the categories and size of land under protection. New legal provisions on fauna species were issued, including the compilation of the country's first Red List, using the IUCN Red List criteria as a reference, which listed protected species based on their threat status in Albania (Vangjeli et al. 1997b). In this period, wolves were, for the first time, granted legal protection in 1994 and their former 'pest' status was abolished on the legal level (Bego 2005, Bego et al. 2002). However, the situation on the ground, in terms of nature conservation in general and large carnivores in particular, did anything but improve. Due to liberalisation measures and weakened state control, pressures on natural resources increased sharply with illegal logging and poaching reaching alarming rates (Qiriazi & Sala 2000, Stahl 2010). Past restrictions on access to game were abolished and hunting was opened to all members of the public. Although, legally, hunting could take place only after being equipped with the necessary permits and documentation, the weakened state control and institutional turmoil of the 1990s, resulted in hunting becoming *de facto* a 'free-for-all' activity, without any form of control or restriction by the state whatsoever.

Albania's transition process from communism to democracy was characterised by great economic and political instability. This instability reached a peak with the civil unrest of 1997, a period during which most of the population became armed and violence increased across the country (Pike 2010). One of the main ecological consequences of this mass armament of the public was an additional and dramatic increase in poaching (Hall 2002). Even though factual information on the status and numbers of wildlife around this period is scarce, it is generally accepted that wildlife populations suffered from an incredible hunting pressure which led to depletion and endangerment of many species, including species such as wild boar and roe deer, which are considered to be very difficult to depopulate and control on the local level in many other European countries (Bego & Koni 1999).

The beginning of 2000s saw some improvements for nature conservation. However, once again, these were largely advances 'on paper' and concerned legislative and institutional frameworks, while the situation on the ground showed very few signs of improvement. Poaching and illegal logging continued unabated to critical levels, with little respect for protected species or areas (Schneider-Jacoby & Spangenberg 2010). A clear indicator of discrepancies existing between improvements 'on paper' versus improvements 'on the ground' was the development of protected areas during this period. Within fewer than twenty years the area of land under protection rose with more than tenfold; from 1.6% of Albania's territory in 1995 to 16.6% in 2014 (Ministry of Environment 2015a). While this development suggests a positive change for nature conservation in Albania, the situation observed within these protected areas was far from being so. Logging, poaching and even mining were continuously evidenced within the newly proclaimed or enlarged protected areas (Fig. 6.1.). Without any clear signs of commitments by responsible institutions to intervene for improving the

functionality of these areas, the new and enlarged protected areas were practically just 'paper parks'. Indeed, these hasty proclamations of protected areas, without any adequate ecological and sociological studies, were not made as a sign of real commitment to protect the integrity of natural habitats, but rather to come into line with international standards and requirements on protected areas (such as the Convention for Biological Diversity targets and Natura 2000 framework) in anticipation of the country's future accession to European structures or as binding obligations to the international treaties and conventions that Albania had previously signed and committed to (Bego & Koni 1999). Designations and enlargements of protected areas were not followed up with adequate steps in protection and management and brought no real changes for improving natural conditions of these sites and reducing human pressures, which in most cases continued undisturbed even after the areas were designated as protected.

On the whole, the situation concerning the use of natural resources during the 1990s and 2000s can be defined as a *laissez-faire* one, where responsible government authorities and institutions did very little to halt or control the continuous seizing of resources by individuals and companies. Widespread corruption and interest in making quick profits resulted in unfortunate policymaking and governance for nature conservation issues. Such policy-making favoured developmental agendas for the benefit of selected individuals, with very little concern for principles of sustainability or long-term strategic planning in natural resources use. A prime example of this approach is the concession policy on hydropower electricity production. During the late 2000s and beginning of 2010s the Albanian government issued concessions for the development of more than 400 hydropower plants, to be built on almost every river and stream of the country (Schwartz 2012, 2015a). For a country the size of Albania, these hydropower plants would pose an incredible pressure on the mostly naturally-flowing rivers of

the country While the majority of these projects have not yet been implemented, those that are under construction or are completed have caused irreversible damage to many riverine ecosystems. The majority of them do not follow environmental criteria, often even being built inside protected areas; something which is in complete contradiction to the national environmental legislation (Schwartz 2015b).

Fig. 6.1. Illegal logging in the Bjeshkët e Oroshit Reserve (left), July 2007, and quarrying in the Tomorri Mountain National Park (right), October 2006. ©PPNEA Archives

The situation of wildlife conservation in general and large carnivores in particular saw few improvements during the 2000s. Two action plans, addressing the conservation of lynx and bears respectively, were prepared by the Ministry of Environment in 2007 (Bego 2007a,b) however they were never followed through with actions and measures on the ground as outlined and intended. All three large carnivore species were listed on the country's Red List

of Threatened Species of 2006 (Misja 2006). The lynx population was classified as Critically Endangered (CR), bears as Vulnerable (VU) and wolves as Lower Risk-Near threatened (LRnt); endangerment statuses that they still hold in the updated list of 2013 (Ministry of Environment 2013). The mid-2000s saw the beginnings of the first commendable efforts for conserving the highly threatened Balkan lynx population. However, these initiatives came from civil society organisations and not from governmental authorities. In 2006, a multi-national project aimed at Balkan lynx conservation began in Albania and Macedonia through the work and collaboration of several local and international non-profit environmental organisations (Breitenmoser et al. 2008). On the other hand, the government drafted and adopted two new and coherent laws for protection and management; the law on wild fauna protection (2008) and the law on hunting (2010), which improved the legal framework for wildlife. In spite of these efforts, illegal hunting seemed to continue unabated during this period and there were very few efforts by responsible authorities to control the situation on the ground. Moreover, widespread corruption and desire for quick profits among institutions and individuals responsible for wildlife, brought about the creation of several speculative agencies promoting recreational hunting to foreign tourists in Albania. While masked as 'legal businesses', these agencies became mechanisms for bringing large numbers of foreign (primarily Italian) hunters who sought to hunt a myriad of mammal and bird species, mostly species which they would not be normally allowed to hunt in their respective countries (Preston 2016). This was when Albanian hunters (legal and illegal), continued their hunting activities all year round and through the entire range of wild animals and birds, and often using methods intended to maximise the hunting bag – such as night hunting through the use of floodlights, use of mimicking devices, and extensive uses of snares and traps. The most recent information from

the Ministry of Environment put the number of people who own hunting guns at 75,000 of whom only 17,000 were registered as hunters, and a mere 5000 apply for yearly hunting permits (Koka 2014), thus complying fully – at least 'on paper' – with state regulations on hunting. While these estimates concern only information related to hunting gun ownership through official documentation, guns under illegal ownership are widespread and are often used for hunting purposes. This phenomenon was confirmed throughout my fieldwork, as several respondents, and mainly hunters, confirmed of knowing cases of illegal hunters using automatic guns and other types of arms, not primarily created or intended for purposes of hunting wildlife.

Although information on the extent and impacts of illegal hunting on wildlife remains scarce, it is widely accepted that fauna in Albania continued to face an alarming pressure through the beginning of 2010s and this seemed to hold true for protected and game species alike. Indications of such a chaotic situation in controlling and managing hunting are visible to the larger public as wild animals are widely exhibited either as killed trophies or kept in captivity, primarily in premises of local businesses such as roadside restaurants and bars (Fig. 6.2.). Bears in particular have been subject to widespread capture for captive exhibitions in such premises. The usual practice employed by poachers has been to capture bear cubs at a young age after killing their mother. Cubs would be subsequently sold to interested restaurant owners, who would usually pay sums ranging from 200 to 600 euros per individual bear cub. The bears would be kept and raised in captivity, under totally inadequate conditions often in cages not exceeding a few square metres in size. Between 2006 and 2014, 42 brown bears were shown to be held captive under such conditions, while estimations for the total number of bears (accounting for unreported and privately kept cases) being held in captivity is as high as 50-60

individuals (Trajçe et al. 2013, 2014b). These phenomena occur quite openly in public, clearly undisturbed by legal consequences on the matter. An extensive survey for generating baseline survey on large carnivores and their main prey species in Albania and conducted by the local NGO PPNEA in 2006-07, recorded 6 illegally killed lynx (shot in the period from 2000 to 2006), taxidermised and used as displays in roadside restaurants, bars and private houses (Trajçe et al. 2008). While the lynx represents the most critically endangered and, consequently, the most protected species by national legislation, their status did little to prevent their killings and pose further endangerment to their already tiny population (Ivanov et al. 2008, Melovski et al. 2014, Trajçe et al. 2009a).

Fig. 6.2. Illegally kept captive bear in a roadside restaurant in Tirana (left) and a stuffed bear on display in a roadside restaurant in Shkopet (right).

This brief historical overview highlights that the nature conservation agenda has almost never been prominent in Albania's policy and governance systems. This has brought dramatic consequences for natural ecosystems and marks of destruction are widely visible across the country. Deforestation, erosion, mining and uncontrolled urban growth have deeply altered landscapes while efforts to protect and preserve natural habitats have not been able to counteract these threats. Although advances in policy and legal framework levels have been commendable since the collapse of the totalitarian regime in early 1990s, their enforcement on the ground has been virtually absent. The situation for large carnivores has, largely, followed the same pattern. Much like the rest of Albania's natural heritage, large carnivores have been suffering consequences of a *laissez-faire* state of governance and lack of control from responsible authorities.

While this historical and continued negligence of state authorities for conserving and managing wildlife is blamed for having brought about many negative situations for populations of many species, large carnivores included, it has nonetheless and unintentionally left the responsibility for wildlife issues to the local public, who have had, more or less, full control of the fate of wild animals in their areas. An exception of state-level neglect was most of the communist period, when hunting was rigorously controlled and wild animals were under the strict ownership of the state. Cases of poaching were rare and punishments for malefactors were severe and diligently followed through. Nonetheless, as far as large carnivores were concerned, this extreme appropriation of wildlife by the state did not seem to create conditions for conflict with locals. Two main factors might have influenced this. Firstly, even though bears and lynx were protected by law, they were largely considered and perceived to be rare species and did not cause much damage to local economies. Lynx were almost never associated with any

conflict, whereas the few problems caused by bears, mostly eating crops and fruits, were negligible and dealt with on an individual case basis. Wolves, on the other hand, were considered a 'pest' species and their killing was actively encouraged by the state through the payment of bounties and several poisoning campaigns were organised as well. As such, the only species considered to cause significant damage to local economies, was actively dealt with either by the central authorities or locals, who had the freedom to kill any wolves they encountered. Secondly, the mass collectivisation of property, which practically wiped out private ownership of land and livestock in rural Albania between 1960 and 1990, meant that most damages caused by large predators were not suffered on the private property of locals but on state property instead. Therefore, these damages did not represent a concern for the locals, but were, largely, a concern for the state.

As presented above, the years following the collapse of the totalitarian regime were characterised by a difficult political and economic transition, reflecting negatively on environmental protection and nature conservation actions. Nevertheless, I would like to argue that the by-products of an overall bad governance following the post-communist years, aside from the obvious negative consequences for wildlife in general, have also had unintended positive influences in maintaining a largely tolerant relationship between locals and large carnivores. The weak influence of the state and its institutions, particularly on remote villages of highland Albania, has, inadvertently, left the management of large carnivores to the responsibility of these rural inhabitants. Particularly in terms of damages from large carnivores, locals do not expect or rely on intervention by the state to provide solutions. These cases are instead dealt with on a local and personal basis, by the sufferers of damage. Moreover, there is no compensation system for damages from large carnivores, or any other form of financial

incentives that strive to lessen the burden of large carnivores to the local population in Albania. Locals who suffer damages from large carnivores, have no financial help from authorities or institutions in dealing with these problems. During a discussion with a forester from Librazhd (Sh), he mentioned a recent case where inhabitants of a village in the nearby region of Elbasan had collectively decided to go out in the mountains to kill a bear that had been regularly feeding on, and destroying, their corn fields. While the forester was completely aware of the legal status of bears as protected species, he did not seem to condemn, neither as a state employee nor on a personal basis, the decision of villagers to seek self-justice for the offending bear. "*Given that the state does not intervene [in such cases], then the individual has to protect himself and his livestock.*" he stated. Another prominent case occurred in September 2016, at the time of writing up this thesis, and received wide media coverage across the country. A group of inhabitants from Vilë, a small village in Kukës municipality, northeast Albania, jointly went on a hunt to kill a bear that had been "terrorising" the village for several months. One of the villagers was quoted by a local newspaper: "*I am fully aware that these rare animals should not be killed, but this one had raided every single corn field in the village. Feeding our children is more valuable than the bear*" (Tota 2016). The responsible authorities did not seek to prosecute the people who killed the bear, even though bears are fully protected by state laws and regulations, and despite it being killed at a time of a complete hunting ban on all wildlife; a prohibition which had been legally in force since March 2014 and which will be discussed in more detail further on.

From an outside perspective, this situation might seem highly unsuitable for both large carnivores and locals. It might be assumed that neither of the parties is to benefit in a situation

where the regulatory mechanisms of the state and its institutions are – simply put – not there, and the management of such situations is completely left to the will of the locals. Following this line of thought, one could easily conclude, that large carnivores ought to be in great danger of extinction if no action from the government or conservationists is taken for protecting and safeguarding them, as there is, in practice, nothing that is stopping angered locals who have suffered damages, or feel threatened, from large carnivores, to go out there and eradicate every last predator. On the other hand, negative consequences could also be imagined for local people as well who might have their livelihoods damaged by the continuous attacks of large predators, which the government is doing nothing to ameliorate through compensatory mechanisms and other interventions. However, the observed reality is far from these two extremes. There seems to be no desire for a systemic and full eradication of predators among locals, and damages suffered from predators seem to form a minor worry, if a worry at all, in the lives of local people that share environments with carnivores. What is observed instead, is a system that comes close to a co-existence model, in which damages are dealt on an individual basis and with consideration to the spatial and moral circumstances that they occur.

Carter and Linnell (2016), discussing the concept of 'co-existence' between people and predators, see the flexibility of institutions (either formal or informal) as one of the crucial elements that helps to foster human adaptation to carnivores. While for Albania, as argued above, formal institutions have been mostly absent for the conservation and management of large carnivores – either because of prioritisation of other sectors, or their incapacity to exert influence in more remote areas – it could be argued that this regulatory process has been governed by the informal institutions represented in customary codes and traditions (collectively represented in the *Kanun*) of communities in highland Albania. The construction

of large carnivores as social actors (Chapters 3 and 4) and their integration into the moral community of highland Albania (Chapter 5), have largely extended these customary rules and practices, relating to humans, to them. This extension of human social codes to animals can be observed in the interrelationships between people and predators in highland Albania. Effectively, the very existence and survival of these customary codes into the present, in almost every aspect of social life organisation among locals, is largely attributed to the prolonged absence of central governmental influence in these areas, particularly since the collapse of the totalitarian regime in the 1990s (Mangalakova 2004, Schwandner-Sievers 2001). Thus, the extension of this institution to relationships with large predators is a manifestation of the self-regulatory local mechanisms provided by the Kanun, in a situation where outside regulations coming from central authorities have been virtually lacking or very marginal in the lives of people in highland Albania. The application of this informal institution has helped to maintain a largely dyadic relationship between people and predators, where damages coming from large predators are largely interpreted according to customary norms in assessing the problems that they pose and the perpetrators involved. The respective reactions to these problems and culprits in interactions between people and predators have clear analogies to the reactions and culprits outlined in the traditional codes of Albania, as in cases of damage and conflict situations emerging from interactions between people. These analogies should not be understood as a point-by-point application of the Kanun's codes and punishments, in which locals decide on their reactions through a literal reading or consultation with written forms of the Kanun. In fact, no respondent whatsoever acknowledged any form of link between customary codes and ways of dealing with large predators. However, what was evident, was that the rhetoric of respondents when talking about these issues, largely fitted with what is known from written

forms of the Kanun. Locals were adhering to customary rules in their relationships with large predators, not necessarily as conscious decisions, but rather more because these rules were a representation of their understanding and behaviour on various issues – including those related to predators – and their ways of regulating social life in the mountains in general.

The continued negligence in adequately integrating conservation in Albania's ethic of governance, coupled with long periods of a vacuum of state and absence of authorities in remote regions of the country, has brought about a system where locals take full responsibilities when it comes to protecting livestock and other property from predators. In spite of the myriad negative social and economic effects and consequences that the lack of state governance brings to remote rural communities (particularly noticeable in deteriorating infrastructure, poor education and poor health care), it could be argued that for matters of large carnivore management, the non-interference of the state in enforcing their protection, has produced a co-existence model where damages from large carnivores are dealt by locals using self-regulatory societal and customary norm. Following the terminology proposed by Young et. al. (2010) and Redpath et. al. (2013) for human-wildlife conflicts, it can be concluded that the only type of conflicts currently observed between people and predators in highland Albania are 'human-large carnivore impacts'. As discussed in chapter 5, even these impacts are not universally perceived as problematic by locals, reducing even further the presumed scale of conflict between people and carnivores. Human-human conflicts, which involve different parties clashing with one-another over the issues of large carnivores and their conservation, are not a prominent problem in Albania, simply because there is no consolidated agenda for the protection and conservation of predators, either by government authorities or other institutions and organisations. The absence of a third party in regulating relationships between people and

predators in Albania has not created grounds for human-human conflicts to emerge, thus the only conflicts related to large predators are on the impacts level; damages which locals evaluate as problematic and in need of solution based on a moral and spatial compass. Solutions are again self-managed by locals and are provided according to traditional codes which regulate the wider social life in highland Albania.

However, one could argue against the efficiency of this dyadic relationship in maintaining a sustainable co-existence between people and predators, without any outside intervention from conservation agencies, on the basis that large carnivore populations have been facing population declines in the past decades. While declines have certainly been noted in large carnivore populations in the past two decades, particularly for lynx and to a lesser extent for bears and wolf, the reasons for these declines seem not to be linked to issues of conflict with people. The Balkan lynx population for instance, which is critically endangered and currently numbering fewer than 10 individuals present in only two areas of Albania (the two study areas of this research project, Munella and Shebenik), has been declining and reaching a critical status due to the depletion of the lynx's main prey species (roe deer, chamois, hares) from uncontrolled hunting, habitat destruction from deforestation, mining and other human activities and direct illegal killings by hunters (Breitenmoser et al. 2008). Direct illegal killings of lynx have, so far, never been documented to have occurred because of reasons of conflict and damages caused to people. As mentioned earlier, a country-wide survey conducted in 2006-07 by researchers of PPNEA, revealed 6 cases of illegally killed lynx from exhibited trophies of stuffed animals in various public bars and restaurants in north and east Albania (Trajçe et al. 2008). The lynx had been primarily hunted for exhibition as trophies and the hunters involved were all townspeople living in towns and cities nearby and were not engaged in any form of

agricultural work and livestock keeping. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, one of the most acute problems that the brown bear population is facing in Albania – besides habitat destruction and trophy poaching, as overarching threats for all three large carnivore species – is their trapping and capturing for purposes of captive exhibitions in roadside restaurants and bars, and the reasons for this phenomenon are almost entirely independent of conflicts with humans. Even though this practice risks activating a 'population sink' (Dias 1996) for bears, by actively killing reproductive female bears from the population and taking away their cubs, the threats posed do not have their origins in conflicts existing between bears and people in highland Albania (Trajçe et al. 2013). The phenomenon is a consequence of a demand driven by outside actors – townspeople and businessmen – who want to use bears for attracting and entertaining customers in their premises and have little to do with existing interrelationships between locals and bears in rural areas.

In summary, it could be argued that, until recently, conflicts between groups of people with competing interests over large carnivores (i.e. human-human conflicts) have not been a social reality in Albania. The main reason for this seems to have been related to the lack of third-parties, either government authorities or other organisations, acting in favour of a top-down protection of predators or towards their conservation in general. The *de facto* management of large carnivores has been left to the will of local villagers who share environments with them. As there have been no consolidated interest groups or authorities striving for the protection and conservation of predators – with whom locals could hypothetically clash, if they were to enforce protection measures for large carnivores – then there has been no human-human conflict emerging.

Such a situation seems to be in stark contrast with several central and western European countries in which large predators are reappearing and establishing populations after being previously extirpated due to human persecution mostly in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century (Breitenmoser 1998, Enserink & Vogel 2006). In most western European countries, human-human conflicts over these predators are quite prominent issues in the wider public discourse. For instance, the reappearance, re-establishments and expansions of wolves in countries such as Norway, Finland and France have been associated with sharp increases of conflicts between farmers and hunters on one hand, and conservation authorities on the other (Bisi et al. 2010, Buller 2008, Krange & Skogen 2011). Proposals for the reintroduction of large carnivores, such as the ones for the reintroductions of wolves and lynx in the United Kingdom are also hotly debated, facing strong opposition from communities of farmers and hunters, and indicating presence of sharp human-human conflicts even in situations where large carnivores are not yet present (Arts et al. 2012, Wilson 2004).

Moreover, as demonstrated in chapters 4 and 5, even the classic types of conflicts between predators and people, i.e. direct impacts and material damages from large carnivores on livestock and other human property, are not always perceived as problematic by locals in highland Albania. In essence, even the damages which would, presumably, give strong reasons for escalation of conflicts between humans and predators, are very much context-dependant in their assessment and interpretation by locals as problematic.

The virtual absence of human-human conflicts and the context-dependant interpretation of damages gives to large carnivores in Albania a low conflict profile, especially compared with the profile of these species in central, northern and western European countries. While large carnivores are highly debated animals in the public discourses of the west and are heavily

politicized due to the antagonisms they create between different groups in these societies, in Albania there is no political or public debate about them. The few controversies they cause are almost entirely faced and dealt by the rural mountain communities and do not go beyond the dyadic interrelationships between locals and predators. These concern locally-interpreted intolerable damages, which have very little to do with the quantity and value of damages in question but rather more with the transgressions of the integrity of the person, the family and of the house. These damages are far from being a wider public issue in the country and even locally, they are largely not made visible and talked about due to concerns of personal and moral integrity.

However, these local communities do not exist in a vacuum and in complete avoidance of outside influences. Even though rural mountainous areas of Albania have been isolated in terms of territorialisation and governmentality, especially since the collapse of the totalitarian regime in the early 1990s, this situation is rapidly changing with the overall improvement of the economic and political landscape in the country. These developments, steered also by Albania's desire for integration into western economic and political structures, are set to bring substantial changes also in the interrelationships between people and predators on the local level. The currently dyadic relationship between locals and large carnivores, which ensures local management based on principles of self-regulatory mechanisms and customary practices may soon be influenced by the increasing outside pressures coming from stronger governmentality and territory control by the state. The steady rise of the nature conservation agenda in particular, pushed both by internal and international factors, will unequivocally influence the existing relationship between locals and predators. The appearance and increase of conservation as a social and political tool that prioritises the preservation of natural habitats

and wildlife species, will largely transform local interrelationships between people and predators from a dyadic one, into a triadic one, in which the interests of the third party (conservationists) and their approach to preserving and managing carnivores could be superimposed to the local model of co-existence observed in highland Albania. The first signs of such influences are already being observed in the country. Recent years have seen serious and increased efforts and signs of commitment of central authorities for preserving the integrity of natural habitats and therefore some strong conservation actions have been pushed forwards. Concomitantly with these protective measures the first signs of conservation conflicts have started to emerge. I will discuss these in more detail in the next section.

6.2. The beginning of conservation conflicts in Albania

In March 2014 the newly elected Albanian government (in power since September 2013), in an effort to control widespread poaching and uncontrolled groups of foreign hunters coming into the country, made a bold decision to completely prohibit any type of hunting of all mammal and bird species in Albania for a period of two years (White 2014). This measure was one amongst many from the new government, which aimed at strengthening and improving governance of the management of natural resources. More generally, it was in line with a series of processes and reforms that the new government had vowed to start, which would improve the country's governmentality and rule of law in anticipation of the requirements for the future integration of Albania in the European Union. The new government soon realised that it did not have the necessary resources nor adequate institutional and legal frameworks, to control and manage the situation of hunting in the country, which had precipitated into a chaotic

mishmash of legal and illegal hunters, either local or foreign, conducting their activities across the entire country and with complete disregard for protected areas, species and hunting seasons. Given this, the government decided to enforce a two-year ban on all forms of hunting, as a sign of serious commitment to changing the chaotic and unsustainable situation observed for more than two decades since the collapse of the totalitarian regime. Basically, any shooting or trapping of animals in the timespan of two years, from 15 March 2014 to 15 March 2016, was to be considered illegal, whether or not the animals were killed by registered hunters or any other individuals. By doing this, Albania became the first country in the world to impose a complete prohibition of hunting on all species of mammals and birds (McKenna 2015). The rationale behind the ban, was not only to give wildlife populations a safe period of time in which they could partially recover, but also to give some time to the new government to overhaul the current institutional and legal framework concerning hunting management, so that by the time the ban would be lifted, hunting would be effectively controlled, managed and monitored (Koka 2014, Ministry of Environment 2014). This initiative was welcomed and applauded by environmental organisations based in Tirana, and also international ones; several of which had been previously involved in discussions with the Ministry of Environment, as well as raising awareness for such a moratorium to take place (Franzen 2014, McKenna 2015, White 2014). At the time, the moratorium was also lauded by the majority of legal and organised hunters in Albania, who felt that the ban was a necessary measure needed for their long term interest in hunting; legal hunters being one of the main losers of the chaotic and unsustainable hunting practices in Albania. This feeling among so-called 'honest' hunters, was also prominent during my ethnographic exploration. The period leading to the moratorium decision and its initial months of implementation, coincided with my presence in the field in

Albania. I had the opportunity to discuss this drastic measure with several hunters and record their opinions of it. Almost all organised and legal hunters seemed to be in favour of such a ban as they felt that wildlife populations had been severely depleted in the past years and a break was needed for them to recover. Two hunters from Librazhd (Sh), members of the local branch of the Hunting Federation, told me that they were in favour of the moratorium, and that they even wanted it to be longer than two years. However, their main worry was that its implementation would not stand up to expectations and that illegal hunters would continue, as usual, to cause havoc and deplete wildlife populations. A similar reaction came from one hunter from Dragostunja (Sh): "*I am a hunter myself and, on one hand, I should be displeased that hunting was banned. However, I have to say that it was the most wonderful thing to do. I only worry if it is going to be followed through correctly. […] I am a hunter for more than 40 years and since [the ban in] March, I have hung up my gun on the wall and I do not take it with me even for protection when I go out in the mountain with livestock.*"

The moratorium's beginning was initially a success as during the first months of its implementation hunting decreased noticeably in Albania. This was probably due to the high level of public debate that the decision for the moratorium had generated; discussions which might have initially intimidated poachers. Towards the end of my fieldwork, in September and October 2014, several people were also pointing out these initial positive effects that the moratorium had had in its short implementation time. Nonetheless, this initial positive situation took a rather quick turn for the worse. Several watchdog groups and environmental organisations raised concerns that with the passing of time, authorities relaxed their controls and were not guaranteeing a proper enforcement of the moratorium (PPNEA & ASPBM 2016, Preston 2016). Especially towards its end, in the second year of implementation, the

moratorium was heavily flouted and the situation of illegal and widespread hunting seemed to have escalated even more than before the moratorium. Legal hunters and hunting organisations expressed a great discontent about this situation and they felt that they were the only victims of this moratorium, since illegal hunters were continuing with their activities. At the same time, the government had realised that the initial objectives they had set themselves for the institutional and legal reform during the time of the moratorium, were not achieved, so they pushed forward a proposal for an extension of the moratorium – this time for a period of five more years. This caused a mass outcry among the organised hunting community, who this time around, completely opposed the extension of the moratorium on the grounds that the government was not capable of ensuring its proper implementation. In spite of the hunters' opposition the government decided in June 2016 to prolong the moratorium for five more years, which, legally, brings an end to all forms of hunting in Albania until June 2021 (Ministry of Environment 2016a). The National Hunting Federation and other hunting associations organised several protests in front of the Prime Minister's offices in Tirana before and after the government's decision to extend the moratorium (BalkanWeb 2016). They have promised to politically support any opposition party that would commit to lifting the moratorium should they come into power after the next general elections, scheduled for June 2017. In the meantime, according to several watchdog environmental organisations and media reports the moratorium continues to be inefficient in stopping hunting on the ground even after its extension, as illegal hunters seem to continue undisturbed in their hunting activities, often by even proudly flaunting killed trophies online in their social media channels (Mejdini 2016).

In spite of the largely unsuccessful hunting ban, the government continued in their efforts to improve the management of natural resources with yet another similar top-down draconian

ban. In October 2015 the first proposals for a 10-years long logging ban were put forward by the Ministry of Environment (Ministry of Environment 2015b). The rationale of this logging moratorium was similar to the hunting one. In order to put a stop to the two-decade long forests destruction from logging companies and individuals, the government would stop every form of commercial logging for a period of 10 years. In the meantime, they would aim to improve the legal and institutional framework related to forests and their management, so that by the time the ban expires the conditions for a sustainable management of forests would be in place. However, this initiative backfired from the beginning. While the proposals and first announcements for the moratorium were made in October 2015, it wasn't until February 2016 that the moratorium came into force legally (Ministry of Environment 2016b). In the three-months gap between the first proposals and the actual approval of the moratorium, a large number of logging companies and individuals, either on legal or illegal grounds, rushed to cut as much wood as possible in several mountainous areas of the country. This extreme intensification of logging occurred because of the realisation that forests would be off-limits for many years to come. Several watchdog organisations and media investigations raised concerns over this situation, warning the public and the authorities that incredible damage was being done on forests from this logging insurgency at an unprecedented scale (PPNEA 2015, Top Channel 2015). After the moratorium entered into force, logging activities initially seemed to decrease, however recent observations and reports from watchdog groups in the field attest that its implementation is far from being adequate. While the moratorium legally bans all commercial logging activities in the country, logging for purposes of heating and domestic use is exempt from this ban. Local governments in municipalities are given the right to provide firewood for the needs of their inhabitants. To do this they contract logging companies, which

are, reportedly, using this loophole in the system and the general lack of control and monitoring on the ground by authorities, to continue their logging activities undisturbed (PPNEA 2016, Tirana Times 2016). Although the first year of its implementation has not yet passed, the moratorium seems to have done very little to stop logging activities. A measure intended for the protection of forests and bringing an end to unsustainable forest use, paradoxically, brought unnecessary destruction to the country's forests.

Political science scholars define conservation as a political tool with which government authorities exert and perfect their 'mastery' of territory control (Hannah 2000, Vaccaro & Beltran 2009). The two moratoria discussed here are the embodiment of such tools with which the Albanian authorities aim to increase governmentality and territory control over areas which have been left to self-organise for more than two decades and with little influence from the rule of law of central institutions. Notwithstanding their ambiguous implementation success, the moratoria on hunting and logging are clear indications of the rise of the conservation agenda in Albania's ethics of governance. They represent strong top-down measures undertaken by the government in an attempt to take control of, and regulate, the management of natural resources of the country, in a situation where such control and management have been largely lacking, or used for narrow interests and personal gains of corrupt individuals, in the past two decades. Concomitantly, these measures are bringing about the first appearances of human-human conservation conflicts, between the government authorities who imposed the moratoria and interest groups who were most affected by their implementation. These initial conservation conflicts also represent signs of potential future conflicts over large carnivores, which are bound to come about because of the impending changes to conservation and management practices.

6.3. Large carnivores in Albania: a future of conflict?

Interrelationships between people and predators in highland Albania have been largely dictated and governed by local norms, traditions and informal institutions which have been used to regulate the life of locals in the absence of central influences by the state authorities. The construction of large predators as social actors with attributes analogous to human actors in the society has integrated these animals into the moral community of humans. This construction and integration, as argued earlier, has helped to maintain a largely tolerant co-existence between people and large carnivores in Albania. Conservation conflicts over large carnivores, in the ways manifested in several western and central European countries, have been, until recently, largely non-existent in the Albanian context. However, the impending changes in governance and the increased momentum that conservation is gaining, could greatly influence the local relationships between people and predators and create grounds for possible conflict escalation in the future.

As all three species of predators are legally protected, and, in theory, these laws should be enforced by the authorities, the future of large carnivores in Albania would seem guaranteed. Paradoxically, the fact that these laws have remained largely 'on paper', is what has most likely ensured a stable coexistence between people and carnivores in Albania, and has not led to an escalation of conflicts between the two parties or with other groups of the society. As locals have been largely free and undisturbed to react (or not react) to cases of damages from large predators, based on their own interpretations and social norms, these animals have not become a matter of major concern for them.

However, considering recent developments in Albania and the country's desire to adhere to, and become integrated with, western political and economic structures, I suggest that such a

situation on the local level will change, and most likely for the worse. Disregarding the local context with top-down regulations on large predators, which, in most cases, have been borrowed or are influenced by western conservation practices would unbalance the local relationships created on principles of self-regulation and customary norms to the expense of large predators. While, at this stage, this prediction remains largely a speculation, experiences from countries that have had a similar context to Albania attest to complications to come. As briefly discussed in Chapter 2, the case of wolves in Croatia best illustrates such a possibility. Croatia is another country in south-east Europe that has gone through broadly similar transitions processes to those that Albania is currently undergoing. In the past 25 years they have transformed from a part of socialist Yugoslavia to a western democracy, having joined the European Union in 2013. Bath and Majic (2001) have documented how protection measures for wolves in Croatia sparked public outrage at the local level and ultimately proved to be more detrimental than beneficial for the wolf population in the country. In 1995 the Croatian government granted full protection to wolves, a commitment influenced by political processes which saw these animals protected in most of Western Europe. Prior to this protection, wolves could be hunted and trapped with no restriction whatsoever and, at the same time, were perceived as much less problematic by locals than other species like fox, wild boar, rodent and even bears (Bath & Majic 2001). The decision, influenced and pushed forward also by groups of concerned biologists and conservationists, turned out to be disastrous for the wolf population. In the years following wolves' protection, their mortality, instead of decreasing, increased 5 to 11 times more than prior to their protection. The sudden top-down change in legislation, taken without any form of consultation with locals and in disregard of the context of local relationships between people and wolves, sparked dissent among the locals, who in

return started killing wolves even more than before to express their dissatisfaction with this decision (Bath & Majic 2001).

It is not unrealistic to assume that similar scenarios could occur in Albania, should the 'de jure' protection of predators became also a reality on the ground. While locals currently view large predators as a minor concern in their daily life, this is mostly because they feel in control of the problems caused and can act upon solving those problems without any external hindrance or punishment by the state. Enforcing the protective legislation of large carnivores on the ground will disempower local inhabitants from the ability to act on problems presented by these animals and consequently, increase dissatisfaction towards the protectors (i.e. conservationists and state authorities) of predators. It is highly likely that this dissatisfaction will be manifested in the forms of protest killings of predators, which would not only be killed in selective occasions of damage causation, but on every occasion presented independently of whether damage is caused or not.

In an effort to avoid such a scenario from happening, authorities could introduce financial schemes that would compensate for the damages caused by predators and lessen their burden on the local population. Such a step might seem the most logical one to take and a fair solution provided to local inhabitants, who, being deprived of the chance to deal with problems from carnivores themselves would at least receive financial compensation for the damages causes or for willing to share the landscape with carnivores. However, it could be argued that such a decision would have disastrous consequences on the current relationships between people and predators. As demonstrated in chapters 4 and 5, the local interpretations of damages have little to do with financial aspects and are instead influenced by customary norms of morality and territoriality present in highland Albania. The introduction of a financial factor into a

relationship that is not based on financial principles could erode the moral and territorial norms in which people relate to large carnivores. Whether a sheep is killed by bears high up in the mountain or down in the village will then matter little to locals, since the financial measure of a killed sheep will be the same, independent of the location of the kill. The application of local codes of territoriality on predators would soon be lost because of financial incentives. In addition, shepherds will have fewer motivations to keep silent and not report instances of damage, since the interest in gaining financial compensation will most likely prevail over saving personal honour and face. The sense of obligation and responsibility towards safeguarding flocks would be under threat as well. It is highly likely that shepherds, given financial incentives over lost livestock, would show less responsibility towards their guarding duties and vigilance against predators will decrease. This would in turn lead to more depredation cases and more claims for compensation. Moreover, mismanagement of compensation funds, fake claims over dead livestock, unfairness in distribution of money, delays, etc. could provide grounds for escalation of conflicts with shepherds and in general increase the dissatisfaction towards the system, as has been shown to occur in various places where financial schemes for conflict mitigation are in place (Bulte & Rondeau 2005, Dickman et al. 2011). Again, large carnivores are faced with major threats from the mismanagement of such schemes as they can quickly fall victims to the locals' anger and dissatisfaction towards the authorities that impose this system.

The role of conservation organisations, be they national or international, will also be of crucial importance in influencing local interrelationships and co-existence with large carnivores. Until recently, large conservation organisations have not had a major interest in Albania. The country's extreme isolation during the communist period, and the political and economic

turmoil of the 1990s kept away most of the international conservation community. However, since the 2000s the presence of major international conservation organisations, such as IUCN, WWF, GEF, Conservation International, Birdlife and others, has increased through various conservation projects and initiatives (CEPF 2011, GEF 2016, IUCN 2012, WWF 2016). At the same time, national conservation organisations operating within the country have been strengthening their positions and increasing their influence, becoming pivotal stakeholders in nature conservation matters in Albania (Donner & Mazreku 2011). Large carnivores are amongst the most preferred species for the work of national and international conservation organisations. They often use and target large carnivores for the purposes of implementing nature conservation projects, fundraising, awareness campaigns and influencing policies and legislation. Large predators often play the role of flagship species for supporting the agenda of conservation organisations because, through them, they can attract the attention of many members of the public and generate public interests more than with other species. In addition, conservation organisations often introduce themselves as mitigators of human-large carnivore conflicts and implement strategies and projects aiming at lessening impacts from predators in any given area. This might be needed and useful in areas where such impacts are detrimental to the livelihoods of local inhabitants, and where the financial incentives or technological techniques provided by conservation organisations to the local population might certainly make a difference for both predators and people. However, such interventions by outsiders need to be considered alongside an in-depth understanding of the local context and interrelationships between humans and large carnivores. As the situation in highland Albania illustrates, conflicts with predators seem not to be a major concern on the local level and cases of damage are self-regulated by locals according to customary norms and practices.

Interventions from conservation organisations often come about with the presumption of the existence of conflict which needs to be addressed; while in reality the few problems faced by large carnivores need no further intervention besides what already exists as local self-regulatory mechanism. Considering this, conservation organisations can potentially bring unwanted attention to impacts from predators and create grounds for their perception as more serious and more problematic issues than they are currently perceived to be. This could pose risks for future conflict escalation, transforming the currently observed context-dependent impacts from large predators, into larger conflicts that would put parties with different interests over large predators in antagonistic situations with each-other. Conservation organisations need to realise that their role as mitigators of conflict can quickly transform into bringers of conflict, should their projects and interventions fail to recognise the local context of human-large carnivore relationships in place.

7. Concluding thoughts

The decision to undertake this research study came after several years of involvement in nature conservation projects in Albania. In particular, my work within the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme, beginning in 2006, made me gradually shape ideas on approaches that required a higher integration of people and social aspects in conservation efforts for the latter to be effective on the ground. Prior to this research, my involvement in exploring people's perceptions and attitudes towards large predators had been largely quantitative in nature. I had led two large-scale questionnaire surveys in the northern and eastern mountain regions of Albania, respectively one aimed at the collection of local ecological knowledge of large carnivores and their prey in 2006-07 (Keçi et al. 2008, Trajçe et al. 2008) and one, a 'human dimensions' survey, aimed at measuring public attitudes and perceptions of large carnivores among a representative sample of the rural population (Trajçe 2010). Both these surveys produced a considerable amount of information in regard to a range of issues existing between people and predators in highland Albania. They had provided the general ideas for future directions in researching human-large carnivore relationships as well as given an overview on the main aspects of these relationships. One of the main findings from this quantitative research revealed that wolves were considered as the most problematic large carnivore of all three species concerned. They were involved in more damage situations than bears and lynx and public attitudes towards them were more negative than towards the other two. In addition, lynx also seemed to stand out in the level of knowledge that people had about their existence as a species in Albania. Most of the rural population did not acknowledge the presence of lynx, on the basis that they did not even know such an animal existed. The opposite was true for bears and wolves where, almost the entire sampled population had knowledge of them, and the

majority had either seen them in their natural environments or as animals in captivity. This information has been used in Chapter 2, as a starting point of my thesis, in order to offer a general picture of the overarching attitudes and opinions that the local population had of large predators. Through statistical analysis and mathematical modelling, a set of explanatory variables affecting these attitudes was revealed. These variables seem to tell a story largely similar to studies of attitudes towards large carnivores, conducted in other countries and contexts; with education, knowledge, gender and livestock ownership, among others, having an effect on people's attitudes towards predators. Most importantly, individual species seemed to have a high effect on attitudes, an indication that the local people clearly separate predators one from the other in regard to their attitudes. These initial results from quantitative research paved the way for more in-depth exploration through ethnographic fieldwork.

The general patterns that emerged from the earlier quantitative surveys were evidenced also throughout my ethnographic exploration. However, the ethnographic approach also opened up new areas of local knowledge that had been missed by quantitative surveys, or were simply inaccessible to them because the nature of this knowledge was not elicited in the questionnaires. The questions asked in the ethnographic research generated a set of different and complementary information regarding how local people perceive, construct and relate to predators; something of crucial importance for adequately understanding people-large carnivore interrelationships in highland Albania. Unveiling local beliefs about large carnivores, such as the widely-believed abilities of lynx to exterminate and deter wolves from their territories, or the belief that wolves would attack the livestock of ill-behaved people as a sign of retribution from higher powers, would have not been possible without an extensive ethnographic exploration of these communities. Such beliefs seem to play a crucial role in

shaping people's attitudes towards large carnivores and can offer important contributions to large carnivore conservation and management strategies. They provide important additions to the explanatory factors of attitudes revealed by quantitative research (such as education, knowledge, etc.) and should be used for improving conservation strategies and management approaches aimed at a sustainable co-existence between people and predators.

I see the results of this research work as being beneficial in three main directions. Firstly, the work of this thesis constitutes one of the few studies on human-animal interrelationships conducted in this part of Europe. In Albania, and more widely in the south-west Balkans there is very little research on large carnivores, or wildlife in general, and even less so on the social and cultural aspects of human relations with them. As such, this research offers some of the first insights into people's attitudes towards, perceptions of, and relationships with large carnivores in Albania. This information is particularly relevant with consideration to the great socio-economic changes occurring in Albania and the wider south-west Balkans, which are also likely to influence people's relationships with carnivores in the future. The results of this thesis might be of help in paving the way for future research on people's interrelationships with predators and other animals, and in general, contribute to the strengthening of a social science component of wildlife research in the Balkans.

Secondly, this research contributes to discourses and debates on the integration of ethnographic research in conservation science and practice (Ingold 1990, Orlove & Brush 1996), and in particular for the understanding and management of conservation conflicts (Knight 2000, Whitehouse 2015). Conservation actors working for the preservation of large carnivores often target local communities that share environments with these animals through approaches aiming at (i) reduction of conflicts and (ii) education and raising awareness. In both cases, the

assumptions and presumptions that there is a need for such approaches to foster coexistence and acceptance of large carnivores by the local population, are pivotal in guiding the actions of conservationists on the ground. In this regard, the results of my research in highland Albania suggest that careful considerations of the local context of human-large carnivore relationships should be made, prior to intervention measures for either purpose. For example, the implementation of financial compensation measures for damages caused by predators with intentions of conflict reduction, would most likely transform the local view on damages, from one that has morality and spatial interrelationship in its centre, into one that has monetary value as a prime determinant. In addition, education campaigns aimed at improving knowledge and raising awareness of predators from the results of ecological and biological research, could risk altering the current set of local beliefs of large carnivores that seem to be crucial in maintaining a mostly peaceful co-existence between people and predators. For instance, one has to ponder, what benefits can be brought to the conservation of lynx, should conservation organisations give ecological information to locals that, for example, shows that lynx are successful hunters of roe deer and chamois with each individual lynx, on average, killing some 60 ungulates per year. Through this factual information, the current local belief, that lynx do not hunt ungulates and that they do not even have the ability to do so, is challenged and this could prove detrimental to the overall positive image that the lynx currently enjoys, particularly among hunters. Successful conservation strategies for large carnivores will require the integration of local beliefs with ecological approaches with the purpose of maintaining co-existence between people and predators and ensuring the sustainability of large carnivore populations.

Finally, I hope that the results of this research might prove useful to other countries and regions, which have broadly similar contexts with Albania and are facing similar issues over the

conservation of large carnivores. Conservation has made a relatively new appearance in Albania's governance and the actors involved in it tend to borrow its frameworks and practices mostly from western models; this being in great part driven by the country's aspirations for integration into western political and economic structures. Several international conservation actors are increasing their presence in Albania through various projects and initiatives, while national conservation actors are strengthening their positions and influence within the society. The strengthening of the conservation movement in general, driven mainly by western models and approaches, may pose risks to local contexts of coexistence between people and predators, should these contexts not be thoroughly considered by conservation actors. Such scenarios are not unique to Albania and are faced in various degrees by several countries, particularly in the developing world (Brechin et al. 2003, Saberwal 2003), which seek to reconcile conservation interests – mostly driven by international pressures and demands – with local well-being and livelihoods. In this regard, the insights generated from this research might be of help in bringing together issues concerning the conservation of large carnivores with an awareness of, and a concern for, rural livelihoods in the context of maintaining or improving the co-existence between people and predators.

8. Appendices

8.1. Ethical Approval

The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference **LSC 13/ 089** in the Department of Life Sciences and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 12 September 2013.

8.2. Participant Consent Form

Consent Form in English:

ETHICS COMMITTEE

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: ***Living with large carnivores: implications for conservation in the South-West Balkans***

Brief Description of Research Project:

This research aims at studying the existing relationships between people and large carnivores – brown bears, grey wolves and Eurasian lynx – in the South-West Balkans. This area is one of the few in Europe where all three large carnivores have continuously been present alongside humans through historic and present times. Their populations however have been under threat in the past decades due to socio-economic and political changes in the region. The information collected in this study will help to better understand the relationships between large carnivores and people and can help determine adequate conservation policies and actions in the concerned countries. Participation in this research project implies giving information to the investigator through one or more of the following methods: observation, interview and focus group discussion. In case of interviews and focus group discussions, participants might be recorded with an audio recorder device. The interviews and group discussions usually last for approximately 40-50 minutes.

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Consent Statement:

I agree to take part in this research, and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings.

Name ……

Signature ……

Date ……

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator. However if you would like to contact an independent party please contact Prof. Anne Robertson, (or if the researcher is a student you can also contact the Director of Studies).

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Consent form in Albanian:

KOMITETI I ETIKËS

FORMULAR PËR MIRATIM NGA PJESËMARRËSI

Titulli i projektit kërkimor: ***Të jetosh me mishngrënësit e mëdhenj: implikimet për ruajtjen në Ballkanin jugperëndimor***

Përshkrim i shkurtër i projektit kërkimor:

Ky projekt kërkimor ka për qëllim të studiojë marrëdhëniet ekzistuese midis njerëzve dhe mishngrënësve të mëdhenj – përkatësisht arinjtë e murrmë, ujqërit dhe rrëqebujt – në rajonin e Ballkanit jugperëndimor. Ky rajon është ndër të vetmit në Europë ku mishngrënësit e mëdhenj dhe njerëzit kanë qenë historikisht të pranishëm përkrah njëri-tjetrit dhe vazhdojnë të bashkëjetojnë dhe në ditët e sotme. Gjithsesi, kohët e fundit, popullatat e mishngrënësve janë në rrezik për shkak të ndryshimeve socio-ekonomike dhe politike në rajon. Informacioni i mbledhur në këtë studim do të ndihmojë të kuptojmë më mirë raportet midis mishngrënësve të mëdhenj dhe njerëzve dhe do të ndikojë në formulimin e politikave më të mira të ruajtjes në vendet e rajonit. Pjesëmarrja në këtë projekt kërkimor nënkupton dhënie informacioni kërkuesit nëpërmjet një apo më shumë prej metodave në vijim: vëzhgim, intervistë dhe diskutime në grupe fokusi. Në rast intervistash apo diskutimesh në grupe fokusi, pjesëmarrësit mund të regjistrohen me një pajisje regjistrimi zanor. Intervistat dhe diskutimet në grup zgjatin përafërsisht 40-50 minuta.

Detajet e kontaktit të kërkuesit: Aleksandër Trajçe
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Deklaratë Miratimi:

Unë jam dakord të marr pjesë në këtë kërkim dhe jam i/e informuar që jam i/e lirë për tu tërhequr në çdo moment. Kuptoj që informacioni që unë do të jap do të trajtohet në mënyrë konfidenciale nga kërkuesi dhe identiteti im do të mbrohet në çdo publikim të rezultateve.

Emri …….

Firma ……

Data ……

Vini re: nëse keni ndonjë shqetësim në lidhje me çfarëdo aspekti të pjesëmarrjes tuaj apo ndonjë paqartësi tjetër ju lutem shprehjani kërkuesit. Gjithsesi, nëse doni të informoheni nga një palë tjetër e pavarur ju lutem kontaktoni me prof. Anne Robertson (në rast se kërkuesi është një student ju mund të kontaktoni dhe me Drejtuesin e Studimeve të tij).

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8.3. Appendices for Chapter 2

The supporting information for Chapter 2, has been included in the accompanying compact disc (CD) to this thesis. The enclosed CD includes (i) the questionnaire form used for conducting the survey in 2007-09 and (ii) the data analysis process, including the model development, fitting and selection. In addition to these, the following information related to the descriptive statistics of the study informants is used in support of Chapter 2:

Tab.1. Demographic profile of respondents per country

	Gender (%)		Age (years)		Residence (%)	
	Male	Female	Mean	Range	Permanent	Temporary
Albania	69.5	30.5	45.8	18-83	94.7	5.3
Macedonia	85.0	15.0	40.5	18-80	94.4	5.6
Total	76.9	23.1	43.3	18-83	94.6	5.4

Tab.2. Hunting and livestock keeping per country

	Practice hunting %	Owner of small livestock %	Owner of big livestock %	Owner of beehives %
Albania	24.1	48.5	77.3	6.5
Macedonia	16.3	8.3	29.6	2.8
Total	20.3	29.3	54.5	4.7

Tab.3. Respondents' education per country

	No education %	Elementary %	Primary %	Secondary %	Tertiary %	N
Albania	1.8	10.9	44.4	36.7	6.2	387
Macedonia	0.6	4.8	24.4	38.2	32.0	356
Total	1.2	7.9	34.9	37.4	18.6	743

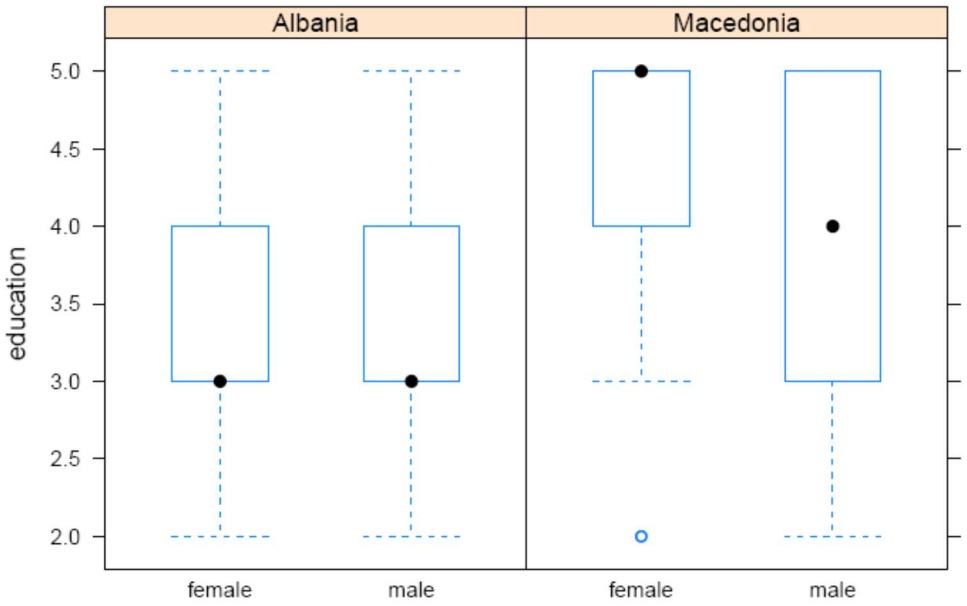


Fig. 1. Education levels of genders in Albania and Macedonia (1 = no education, 2 = elementary, 3 = primary, 4 = secondary, 5 = tertiary). Black dots represent medians.

8.4. Interview guide

The following is the interview guide that I used for my ethnographic fieldwork in Albania from October 2013 to October 2014. It is important to highlight that this format was not used to ask all questions in a thorough and consecutive form from beginning to end, but rather more to have a set of questions which would help to steer discussions with locals in the right directions and keep conversations going. Not every question included here was asked to every respondent and only few of them were asked in most interviews. Free-flowing conversations were given priority over this set of semi-structured questions, however when the conversations would drift away too much from the topic of carnivores, I would usually use any of the following questions to focus the discussion on the topic.

Interview guide on large carnivore species

Interactions:

1. Have you ever seen a bear/wolf/lynx in the wild?
2. If yes, what was your feeling the first time you saw a bear/wolf/lynx?
3. Have you ever seen a bear/wolf/lynx in captivity?
4. Have you ever killed a bear/wolf/lynx?

General attitudes, tourism:

5. Can you give some words that best describe the bear/wolf/lynx for you?
6. Do you think that bears/wolves/lynx have to be maintained for the future generations?

Damages:

7. Do you think that bears/wolves/lynx are harmful for livestock?
8. Have you experienced any damages from bears/wolves/lynx?
9. Do you have recent examples of livestock damage in your region?
10. Do you think that individual bears/wolves/lynx that kill livestock have to be killed?

11. Do you agree to kill them by shooting?

12. Do you agree to kill them by poisoning?

13. Do you agree to kill them by trapping?

14. Do you think we have to regulate the number of bears/wolves/lynx in the district/county/country?

15. Do you think we have to remove the bears/wolves/lynx from the district/county/country?

16. Does the government pay compensation for the damages caused by bears/wolves/lynx?

17. Do you think that livestock breeders that lose livestock due to bears'/wolves'/lynxes' attacks should be compensated?

18. If yes, who has to pay compensation?

Fear:

19. Do you think that bears/wolves/lynx are dangerous for people safety?

20. Yourself, are you afraid to hike in woods where bears/wolves/lynx are present?

Knowledge:

21. How much is a weight of an adult bear/wolf/lynx?

22. Generally, what do the bears/wolves/lynx eat? (animals or plants)

23. If animals, do they eat more often wild or domestic animals?

24. Do the bears/wolves/lynx live solitary, in pairs or in group?

25. If in group, what is the size of the group?

26. Do you think the number of bears/wolves/lynx in the district/county/country is decreasing, increasing or remaining the same?

27. By law, do the hunters are allowed to hunt bears/wolves/lynx?

28. Do you know if there is some poaching of bears/wolves/lynx in the district/county/country?

29. Are there any uses of the bear/wolf/lynx body parts (meat/pelt/organs/bones)? In traditional medicine for example?

Management:

30. Do you think that bears/wolves/lynx have an impact on wild ungulates populations?

31. If yes, does-it prevent hunting in the district/county/country?

32. Do you think there are positive benefits to have bears/wolves/lynx in the district/county/country? Why?

33. Do you think there are negative effects to have bears/wolves/lynx in the district/county/country? Why?

34. Do you think that bears/wolves/lynx belong to your district/county/country? (Explain: this species has been here and is part of the natural/cultural heritage)

35. Do you think that bears/wolves/lynx should be protected in Albania? Why?

36. Would you agree to increase the number of bears/wolves/lynx in Albania? Why?

37. Do you think that there should be authorised (legal) hunts of bears/wolves/lynx in Albania?

Three species comparison

38. What is the most intelligent species between the bear, the wolf, and the lynx?

39. What is the most beautiful species between the bear, the wolf, and the lynx?

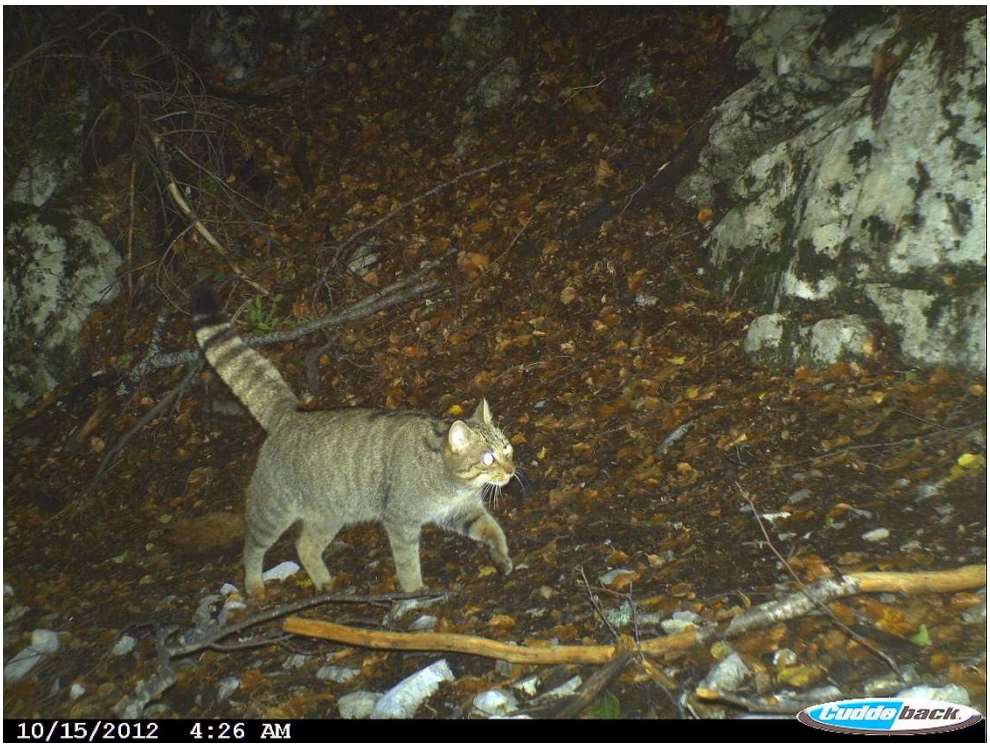
8.5. Photographs used for identification of lynx

Since lynx were often mistakenly identified with other animals (most commonly with badgers, wildcats and martens), I had to resort to photographs to check whether respondents who claimed to know lynx, were talking about the right species during conversations. The following is the set of photographs used for this purpose.

Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*) in Shebenik-Jabllanica National Park. ©PPNEA/BLRP

Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*) in Munella mountain. ©PPNEA/BLRP

Eurasian badger (*Meles meles*). ©PPNEA/BLRP



European wildcat (*Felis silvestris*) ©PPNEA/BLRP

Stone marten (*Martes foina*). ©PPNEA/BLRP

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